

# **Jews and Miracles in Tales from the *Legenda Aurea***

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## Declaration

I declare that this thesis was written by me, is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed,

Date, 29 Sept. 2006

## Abstract

The medieval Christian attitude towards Jews cannot be easily characterised. Legend often portrayed Jews as hostile, grotesque and murderous. Yet close reading of medieval Christian stories about Jews reveals a more complex picture. The *Legenda Aurea*, compiled by Jacobus de Voragine in the thirteenth century from earlier sources, includes among its recitals of saints' lives, miracles and related religious themes a number of tales in which Christian miracles are brought forth, albeit perhaps unwittingly, by the agency of Jews. In these tales, Jews may be shown engaging in 'hostile' behaviour such as the desecration of Christian images, but also in surprisingly 'benign' behaviour, such as invoking the protection of the cross. In either case, Jewish characters always play a significant role in enabling the occurrence of miraculous events. These miracles then restore order by silencing unbelief, causing the reform of erring Christians, and bringing about the conversion of the Jewish protagonists. Thus, the portrayal of Jews in the *Legenda Aurea* is not merely a series of denunciations of Jews, but rather a complex attempt to invoke Jewishness in situations that inevitably lead to the transformation of Jewish identity into Christian identity.

Christian theological and social ambivalence toward Jews (discussed in Chapter One) developed from the Pauline doctrine of the Jews as the first, though undeserving, recipients of Christianity, and the Augustinian concept of Jews as outcast and subjugated, but still crucial witnesses to Christian truth. This truth was attested to in early and medieval rhetoric about miracles (Chapter Two); miracles involving saints, icons and Christian symbols were cited to affirm divine sanction for Christ and Christianity, and could be instrumental in converting Jews. Following this discussion of Jews and of miracle, the three final chapters discuss tales from the *Legenda Aurea* that depict miracles being enabled by Jewish actions. These could be hostile Jewish attacks on Christian images or personages (Chapter Three). However, other tales depict Jews inviting miracles by behaving as if they had some belief in, or secret knowledge of, Christ or the cross (Chapter Four). Finally, the 'Silvester' legend (Chapter Five) depicts Jews disputing with Christians and turning to magic when rhetoric fails, but being vanquished by a Christian miracle that they themselves have challenged the saint to perform.

In these various tales, Jews inhabit a transformative space in which icons are prompted to bleed or speak, Christ's cross appears from the ground, and a dead bull is brought to life. Individual Jewish characters refer to the role of the Jewish people in Christian salvific history, with emphasis on the Crucifixion and Resurrection and on the conversion of all Israel at the end of time. Jews are connected to death and resurrection, symbolised by the burial, unearthing and transformation of people and objects, and to blood, whether in genealogical or literal terms. Ultimately, while the *Legenda Aurea* tales may have sought to marginalise Jews and distance Christian practices and attitudes from those, real or imagined, of Judaism, they nonetheless return again and again to ideas of the Jew, which they show to be inescapably intertwined with the fundamentals of early and medieval Christian beliefs.

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## Abbreviations

<i>CCCM</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis</i>
<i>CSCO</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalum</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>EETS</i>	<i>Early English Text Society</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Latina</i>

## Introduction

This thesis is a literary and thematic exploration of the conjunction of Jews and miracles in early and medieval Christian narrative, as represented by tales included in Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century compilation of saints' lives, miracles and assorted religious themes, the *Legenda Aurea*.<sup>1</sup> Although the majority of the material in the *Legenda Aurea* is not concerned with characters identified as Jews (excluding Christ and his family or followers), miracle tales that feature Jewish characters play an important role in the *Legenda*, largely due to the presence of two long episodes, in the chapters 'St. Silvester', and 'The Finding of the Holy Cross', both set at the time of the emperor Constantine, that engage with the seminal moment of the Christianisation of Rome and the founding of the Roman Church, and elucidate the place of Jews in the new Christian order. In addition to these, Jacobus has included within various of his chapters a number of short narratives in which Jews and miracles significantly interact.<sup>2</sup>

The *Legenda Sanctorum* of the Dominican friar Jacobus de Voragine was compiled c. 1260 and became known as the *Legenda Aurea*, a mark of the value attributed to it by its wide medieval audience: 'the popularity of the Legend was such that some one thousand manuscripts have survived, and, with the advent of printing in the 1450s, editions both in the original Latin and in every Western European

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<sup>1</sup> The editions used here are Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. by William Granger Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) (*GL*); *Legenda Aurea*, ed. by Theodor Graesse, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, (Breslau: Koebner, 1890; repr. Melle: Wagners, 2003) (*LA*). Ryan's translation mainly follows Graesse. A recent Latin edition from Italy was found too late for use in the present work: Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. by Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2 vols (Florence: Sismel, 1998). Maggioni is useful on Jacobus' sources.

<sup>2</sup> Long or shorter tales involving Jews occur in the following chapters: 'St Nicholas', *GL* I, pp. 21-7, *LA*, pp. 22-9; 'St. Stephen' *GL* I, pp. 45-50, *LA*, pp. 49-56; 'St Silvester', *GL* I, pp. 62-72, *LA*, pp. 70-9; 'St Basil', *GL* I, pp. 108-13, *LA*, pp. 121-6; 'The Resurrection of the Lord', *GL* I, pp. 216-14, *LA*, pp. 235-45; 'St James, Apostle', *GL* I, pp. 269-77, *LA*, pp. 295-303; 'The Finding of the Holy Cross', *GL* I, pp. 277-84, *LA*, pp. 303-11; 'St Barnabas', *GL* I, pp. 318-21, *LA*, pp. 346-9; 'The Assumption of the Holy Virgin', *GL* II, pp. 77-97, *LA*, pp. 504-27; 'The Beheading of John the Baptist', *GL* II, pp. 132-40, *LA*, pp. 566-75; 'The Birth of the Virgin', *GL* II, pp. 147-60, *LA*, pp. 585-95; and 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross', *GL* II, pp. 168-73, *LA*, pp. 605-11. This list excludes chapters about Christ, his family and followers, and mentions of Jews that do not involve miracle narrative.

language multiplied into the hundreds'.<sup>3</sup> The *Legenda* is organised around the liturgical calendar, each chapter taking as its subject a saint, Christian figure or Christian theme. The chapters begin with the etymology of the saint's name,<sup>4</sup> typically followed by accounts of the saint's life and posthumous miracles, and often include a number of short tales or legends relating to the saint or holy figure in question. Although the work was compiled in the latter half of the thirteenth century, many of the tales included had much earlier provenances. For example, Drijvers and Drijvers have edited a fifth- to sixth-century Syriac text of the legend 'The Finding of the True Cross'.<sup>5</sup> Many of Jacobus' sources date back to the earliest centuries of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Some of these tales had many variants, which emerged into literary culture at various times in diverse forms.<sup>7</sup>

Given the earlier provenance of much of Jacobus' material, it can be difficult to relate the stories to any one specific historical or cultural context, to determine a precise readership for the tales or an exact historical setting either for their creation or their reception. The attitudes reflected in the texts cannot be seen to belong exclusively to a particular moment in time. Inevitably, the conditions and attitudes within which, for instance, a fifth-century tale was shaped would have altered or vanished by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, at the time when manuscripts of the *Legenda Aurea* proliferated across Europe. When looking at a thirteenth-century version of a fifth- or sixth-century narrative, like the legend of the finding of the True Cross, that may have spawned many variants in the intervening time, there is a

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<sup>3</sup> Ryan, introduction to *The Golden Legend*, p. xiii. Also cf. Sherry Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of its Paradoxical History* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1985), pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images 4000-1200* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) pp. 158-60, on Jacobus' etymologies as 'elaborately punning riffs of memories' that connect the saint and his or her virtues using 'associative play', (p. 159).

<sup>5</sup> *The Finding of the True Cross: The Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac*, ed. and trans. by Han J. W. Drijvers and Jan Willem Drijvers, CSCO. Subsidia; v. 565, t. 93 (Louvain: Peeters, 1997). Also cf. 'The Coming of the Holy Cross' and 'Story of the Discovery of the Honourable and Life-giving Cross', in *Constantine and Christendom: The Oration to the Saints, The Greek and Latin Accounts of the Discovery of the Cross, The Edict of Constantine to Pope Silvester*, trans. by Mark Edwards (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), pp. xxx-xl, 63-91.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Alain Boureau, *La Légende dorée: Le système narratif de Jacques de Voragine* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), pp. 75-108, for a discussion of Jacobus' sources.

<sup>7</sup> The legend of the finding of the Holy Cross, for example, was a popular theme with many variants. For texts of medieval English versions, cf. *Legends of the Holy Rood, Symbols of the Passion and Cross-Poems*, trans. by Richard Morris, *EETS* 46 (London: Trübner, 1871).

problem in determining to what exact period the tale's treatment of its subject belongs.

Since the subject of the present work is the examination of the roles of Jewish characters in selected tales, one obvious approach would be to link the treatment of Jews in the tales with historical relations between Christians and Jews at the time of the appearance of the *Legenda Aurea*. A similar approach to short medieval tales has been carried out with great success by Miri Rubin in her treatment of host-desecration narratives.<sup>8</sup> However, since the emergence of the host-desecration narrative was relatively late, the tales Rubin studies are in many cases contemporary with the historical clashes between Christians and Jews with which the narratives are linked.<sup>9</sup> It is thus appropriate that Rubin's work concentrates on attitudes toward Jews at the places and times of the emergence of the tales. In the case of the *Legenda* material, however, it is important not only to focus on the moment of the work's compilation, but also to investigate earlier attitudes and concerns that may have helped to shape the tales, especially (where this can be determined) tales of an early original date. Thus, early Christian attitudes toward Jews are here as relevant as thirteenth-century attitudes. The 'St Silvester' chapter, for example, which is the subject of the most detailed intertextual comparison of the tales discussed below, will only be compared to similar narratives that originally emerged, like the Silvester legend, in the early medieval period, rather than to late-medieval tales about Jews with which it has much less in common.<sup>10</sup> In some instances a historical context, such as the struggles of the early Church or the Christian-Jewish disputations in thirteenth-century Europe, may be suggested as a way into examining the themes of a particular tale.<sup>11</sup>

However, these remain suggestions only. This is intended as a literary and thematic exploration of narratives about Jews and miracles, rather than a historical analysis. Interrelations between narrative patterns, sometimes within a fairly wide intertextual context, will be looked at, but without necessarily attempting to link these patterns with specific historical events. The overall emphasis will be on the

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<sup>8</sup> Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid; cf. for example pp. 48-69 and 105-31.

<sup>10</sup> 'St Silvester' is discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Chapters Four and Five.



*Legenda* tales as texts, exploring ways in which the tales' treatment of Jews and miracles relates to early and medieval Christian ideas of the Jew. Jewish characters in these tales will be seen to be protean symbols that reflect at all times early and medieval Christianity's conflicted relationship with its Judaic past.

More specifically, we are here concerned to discover how miracles could be used to explore the perceived place of Jews in the Christian paradigm within a particular medieval form, the 'miracle tale', here defined as a short religious narrative whose plot centres on the occurrence of a Christian miracle. This definition is preferred to, for example, a category such as 'medieval exemplum', which makes a statement as to how a given tale was used. Although miracle tales may have been used as sermon exempla, they were also transcribed in collections that any literate person could read, and some may have circulated in some form as oral histories as well.<sup>12</sup> Miracle tales may have originally appeared in written form under a variety of headings. These include collections of saints' lives like the *Legenda Aurea*, tales about the Virgin Mary, homilies, or monastic teaching tales like those of Caesarius of Heisterbach.<sup>13</sup> These categories are not mutually exclusive, so that a sermon exemplum might feature saints' miracles or miracles of the Virgin, as might a monastic teaching tale. Furthermore, miracle tales could be classified into sub-headings, again not mutually exclusive, such as Marian miracles or host-desecration narratives.<sup>14</sup> 'The miracle tale', writes David Flory, 'can take many forms, hence the difficulty of defining the genre. It may be recited aloud as poetry, told as a story, sung, performed on stage, or read in silence.'<sup>15</sup> Chaucer's 'Prioress' Tale', for

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ryan, *GL* I, p. xviii: 'That the *Legend* became a book for private reading and devotion seems indisputable', and p. xvii: 'That most of these narratives were at least partially fictional – or better, the product of generations or oral retelling – in no way diminished their effectiveness.'

<sup>13</sup> Cf. for example Nigel of Canterbury, *Nigel of Canterbury, Miracles of the Virgin Mary, in verse: Miracula Sancte Dei Genitricis Virginis Marie, versificae* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, for the Center for Medieval Studies, c1986); Gautier de Coinci, *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame*, 4 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1955-70); John Mirk, *Mirk's Festial: a Collection of Homilies*, EETS E.S. 96 (London: Paul, Trench & Tübner, 1905); and Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles* (2 vols), trans. by H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland (London: Routledge, 1929)

<sup>14</sup> For Marian miracles, cf. e.g. Gautier de Coinci. For host desecration narratives, cf. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, and Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (New Haven: Yale, 1943), pp. 109-23.

<sup>15</sup> David A. Flory, 'The Social Uses of Religious Literature: Challenging Authority in the Thirteenth-Century Marian Miracle Tale', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 13 (1996) Illinois Medieval Association, 61-9 <<http://www.illinoismedieval.org/ems/VOL13/flory.html>> [accessed 13.03.2006], p. 64.



example, is a Marian miracle retold in verse,<sup>16</sup> while the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is a dramatised host-desecration tale.<sup>17</sup>

As far as miracle tales about Jews are concerned, they do not seem to have constituted a contemporary genre, and may be scattered through a variety of works with other emphases, as we see in the *Legenda*, Caesarius' *Dialogue on Miracles* and other collections.<sup>18</sup> Yet miracle tales featuring Jews contain striking structural similarities and related themes. For example, many miracle tales involving Jews include the following elements. A Christian community is depicted as being under threat by some form of unbelief,<sup>19</sup> which may be represented by deficient Christian characters in addition to the Jewish characters.<sup>20</sup> In the course of the tale, a miracle occurs in the presence of, and even caused through the agency of Jewish characters. The form the miracle takes often refers to some aspect of the Christian story such as the Crucifixion or the Resurrection.<sup>21</sup> Following the miracle, the faith of lapsed or erring Christians is strengthened, while the Jewish characters usually convert to

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<sup>16</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey, 'The Prioress' Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson and F. N. Robinson, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Oxford: OUP, 1988), pp. 209-12.

<sup>17</sup> 'The Play of the Sacrament', *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. by Norman Davis, *EETS S.S.* 1, (Oxford: OUP, 1970), pp. lxxi-v, 58-89.

<sup>18</sup> In the *Legenda*, only twelve chapters out of one hundred and eighty-two include tales or legends about Jews of the type we are concerned with; this excludes other mentions of Jews, and Jews who appear in a biblical context, such as the Maccabees or Christ, his family and followers. In the *Dialogue on Miracles*, Caesarius includes three tales about Jews in his section 'Of Contrition', Chs 23-6 (I, pp. 102-110), and another in 'Of Miracles', Ch. 69, (II, p. 227). *Mirk's Festial* contains twelve miracle tales about Jews (including the tale of Simon Magus which is not a tale about an identified 'Jew' as such, but which contains parallels to the Silvester legend, discussed in Chapter Five) some of which are sourced from the *Legenda* (pp. 14-15, 27-8, 31-2, 108-9, 142-6, 189-90, 223-4, 227, 248-9, 252 and 302-4). The English version of the *Gesta Romanorum* includes just one tale about Jews (61, pp. 377-9, also found in Caesarius), but Jews may feature in the morals following the tales (e.g. the moral to 42, pp. 169-70). *The Early English Version of the Gesta Romanorum*, ed. by Sidney Herrtage, *EETS E.S.* 33 (London: Trübner, 1879)

<sup>19</sup> The presence of Jews within Christian communities itself represented an ongoing threat; cf. for example the menacing presence of the Jewish ghetto in Chaucer's 'Prioress' Tale'.

<sup>20</sup> The tale of the temptation of Bishop Andrew by demons in 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross' shows an erring Christian whose reform mirrors the conversion of a Jew (*GL* II, pp. 172-3; *LA*, pp. 609-11). Cf. also the Croxton 'Play of the Sacrament', in which a mercenary Christian merchant and a gluttonous cleric enable a Jew to obtain the Host, and are subsequently found out and brought to repentance.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. for example the attack by Jews on an image of Christ in the *Legenda*, 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross': 'they trampled the picture and renewed upon it all the indignities of the Lord's passion. When they thrust a lance into the image of his body, a copious flow of blood and water issued from it.' *GL* II, p. 171. ('*imaginem vero conculcantes pedibus cuncta in ea dominicae passionis opprobria renovarunt. Cum vero latus lancea perforassent, ubertim sanguis et aqua exivit.*' *LA*, p. 609.)

Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Miracle tales about Jews thus display enough of a standard format to justify thinking of them as belonging to a sub-genre, even if it was not one recognised by the medieval authors and compilers of the tales.

Although we have said that Jews are important in these particular tales as helping to bring Christian miracles about, it should be noted that miracle tales featuring Jewish characters constitute only a small proportion of medieval miracle tales. It cannot be argued, therefore, that Jewish characters are necessary in order for miracles to occur in medieval Christian miracle tales. How then do miracle tales featuring Jews, in which Jewish activity helps to bring about the miracle, fit in with miracle tales in general, in which miracles occur in other ways? One way in which this relationship can be elucidated is to think of miracle tales as opening with the premise that something is amiss in the Christian universe. Illness, demonic activity, assaults on Christians or Christian icons, lack of faith or some other problem is presented, awaiting miraculous resolution.<sup>23</sup> These problems can be thought of as ills affecting the Corpus Christi, a metaphor which could encompass the entire Church, or the Christian community, with individuals being members of the sacred body. This originally derives from St. Paul, who told the faithful: 'You are the body of Christ [...]' (I Cor. 12. 27)<sup>24</sup> Another common early and medieval Christian idea was that of Christ the physician, who healed the sins of mankind, and illness was often connected to sin or demonic activity, for both of which the cure was faith.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Cf. the ending of Caesarius' 'Clerk who debauched a Jewish maiden' in which Jews indignant at the Christian clerk's conduct are miraculously struck dumb: 'By [contrition] the lapsed was restored, the Jews were put to silence, and an infidel woman brought to the faith.' *Dialogue on Miracles*, I, p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> Examples from the *Legenda* are: illness, many examples, such as the healings of St Francis, *GL* II, pp. 229-30, *LA*, pp. 672-4, or posthumous miracles of St Dominic, *GL* II, pp. 55-74; *LA*, pp. 479-82; demonic activity, 'St Antony', *GL* I, p. 93-4; *LA*, p. 104-5, or 'St Fursey, Bishop', *GL* II, pp. 198-200; *LA*, pp. 639-42; assaults on Christians, many examples, such as martyrs in 'St Blaise', *GL* I, pp. 152-3; *LA*, pp. 168-9, or 'St Vincent', *GL* I, pp. 105-8; *LA*, pp. 117-20; attacks on Christian icons, 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross', *GL* II, pp. 170-1; *LA*, pp. 608-9; damage to sacred objects, 'St Donatus', *GL* II, p. 60; *LA*, p. 485, or, very similar, 'Saint Laurence, martyr', *GL* II, p. 68; *LA*, p. 494; lack of faith, St Philip combating paganism, *GL* I, p. 267, *LA*, p. 292, or Gregory converting a woman to belief in the Eucharist, *GL* I, p. 179; *LA*, pp. 197-8.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. also I Cor. 6. 15 and Rom. 12. 5. Chrysostom, urging Christian solidarity against Judaizing, adopts the same metaphor, describing Christ as the head of the Church and his listeners as the body: '[...] It is the function of the head to join all the limbs together, to order them carefully to each other, and to bind them into one nature. But if you have nothing in common with your members, then you have nothing in common with your brother, nor do you have Christ as your head.' John Chrysostom, *Saint John Chrysostom: Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, trans. by Paul W. Harkins, Fathers of the Church 68 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1979), 1.3.6, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.9.3, p. 238: '[Christ] went around to cities and towns and cured sickness of both body and soul.'

Jews, then, can be seen as representing one facet of the ills that could beset the Corpus Christi.<sup>26</sup> The Jewish threat to Christianity plays itself out in miracle tales in certain typical ways. As the supposed killers and tormentors of Christ, Jews enjoyed in mythical treatments a particularly intimate relationship with Christ's body, since it was the Jews who were thought to have inflicted wounds upon it. Jews, when shown as attacking Christian icons or (in some later tales) the Eucharist, are seen to be carrying out a literal assault on the Corpus Christi. In many cases the images miraculously manifest, for example by bleeding, to demonstrate the reality of Christ's presence and the damage inflicted by the Jewish attack.<sup>27</sup> In other tales Jewish characters often display knowledge of or faith in Christ or the cross.<sup>28</sup> In these stories, the 'illness' depicted as afflicting Christendom is the Jews' obstinate refusal, despite their knowledge of Christ, fully to accept Christianity. This 'illness' is healed by the Jews' eventual conversion.

In order for the Corpus Christi to be left free of the infection of unbelief at the close of a miracle tale, Jewish characters must undergo a definitive transformation. They may simply be defeated and punished, as in Chaucer's 'Prioress' Tale'. In some cases, Jews are punished by means of a miracle, and subsequently convert, as in Jacobus' 'Assumption of the Virgin'.<sup>29</sup> In other cases, a miracle that is not punitive causes Jews to experience revelation, followed by conversion. Participating in the Christian miracle triggers the awakening of Jewish 'literal' or 'carnal' perception to an experience of 'spiritual', and by definition Christian, understanding, and ultimately leads to the replacement of the characters' Jewish identity by Christian identity. While the miracle tale genre in general uses narratives about miracles to resolve a variety of threats to the wholeness of the Corpus Christi, tales featuring Jewish characters focus on the specific kinds of threat believed to be posed to Christendom by the Jews.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1.1.4, p. 3: 'Another very serious illness...has become implanted in the body of the Church.' 1.1.5, pp. 3-4: 'What is this disease? The festivals of the pitiful and miserable Jews are soon to march upon us [...] some [Christians] are going to watch the festivals, and others will join the Jews in keeping their feasts [...] if I should fail to cure those who are sick with the Judaizing disease [...] some Christians may partake in the Jews' transgressions...' Here the 'disease' is not merely the Jewish presence, but their ability to, as it were, infect Christians with the desire to perform Jewish practices.

<sup>27</sup> *Legenda* tales dealing predominantly with Jewish hostility will be discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>28</sup> Tales in which Jews display aspects of Christian faith or knowledge will be discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>29</sup> *GL* II, pp. 77-9; *LA*, pp. 504-27.

The use of these tales to neutralise, in literary form, the Jewish threat, points to the power of miracle as a rhetorical device. In early and medieval Christian discourse, narratives about miracles could be a site of dispute between belief and unbelief, a means of asserting ideas about the structure of reality, a tool of religious and political debate and a means of constructing identity. Miracle could serve as a powerful textual device, a working-out in narrative form of the problems posed to medieval Christian identity by various kinds of unbelief, and a way of envisaging possible solutions. What the miracle accomplished within the confines of the tale, the medieval miracle narrative sought to echo in terms of ideal audience response, that is, the containment of un-Christian attitudes and behaviour, within the individual and the community. Using the miraculous event as a form of problem-solving, medieval miracle tales could become ways of addressing the gap between an ideal Christendom and a messy reality that included both the possibility of faulty Christian practice and the presence of competing religions such as Judaism. Within medieval Christian texts, miraculous resolutions to the problem of unbelief not only provided a sense that a definitive solution was possible, but also helped frame the very existence of unbelief within a divine plan proceeding towards the eventual conversion of all people to Christianity, as Jacobus says: 'First we plead for the salvation of the pagans...and then pray for the salvation of the Jews, to whom God gave the Law' (*'In prima [...] petimus salutem gentium [...] In secunda salutem Iudeorum, quibus Deus dederat legem'*).<sup>30</sup>

The complexity of the Christian relationship to Jews and Judaism, signalled above by Jacobus, presented particular and inevitable tensions, which the miracle tale both brought into play and attempted to resolve. A salient factor of the Jew as envisaged by medieval Christianity was his dual nature, being on the one hand the exclusive recipient of Mosaic Law, and yet on the other excluded from what Christians saw as the culmination of that law in Christ. This paradox gave rise to conflicted narrative treatments of Jews in early and medieval Christian literature.<sup>31</sup> The complex medieval Christian image of the Jew that is largely built around the paradoxical status of Jews in early Christian theology has been called the

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<sup>30</sup> *GL* I, p. 6; *LA*, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> This is discussed in Chapter One.

‘hermeneutical’<sup>32</sup> or ‘mythical’<sup>33</sup> Jew. These terms imply a recognition that representations of Jews in early and medieval Christian literature and art mirror contemporary Christian theology, folklore and attitudes rather than necessarily reflecting the historical reality of contemporary Jewish populations.

Throughout the early and medieval periods, the ‘hermeneutical Jew’ assumes a variety of forms. Perhaps it is the most obviously pejorative medieval representations of Jews, often grotesque and surreal, that occupy the forefront of modern attention. Pictorial, sculpted, narrative and dramatic medieval portrayals could construct Jews as hostile, blind, perverse, carnal, bestial and/or murderous: Chaucer famously drew upon such representations in his ‘Prioress’ Tale’, in which a young Christian boy is murdered and thrown into a privy by Jews.<sup>34</sup> Portrayals of Jews in the high and late medieval and the early modern periods, from about the twelfth century onwards, are increasingly negative, portraying Jews as violent and subhuman; ritual murder and host-desecration narratives, as well as pejorative visual images such as the *Judensau* (a depiction of Jews suckling a sow and drinking its excrement), are late-medieval in origin.<sup>35</sup> However, amongst the medieval Christian images of Jews that feature overt grotesquery and violence are others that appear to display the Jew in a more favourable light. Some of these portrayals emerge from the early Christian and early medieval periods, the settings for many of the tales in the *Legenda Aurea*. While some of the portrayals of Jews in the *Legenda Aurea* depict Jews behaving in a hostile manner towards Christians or Christian icons,<sup>36</sup> others feature Jews who react to Christianity without hostility, even displaying signs of

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<sup>32</sup> By Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) pp. 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. for example Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, p. 216: ‘The mythical Jew, outlined by early Christian theology and ultimately puffed out to impossible proportions, supplanted the real Jew in the medieval mind, until that real Jew to all intents and purposes ceased to exist.’

<sup>34</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 209-12. The medieval versions of this tale that Chaucer drew upon are listed in Carleton Brown, ‘The Prioress’ Tale’, in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, ed. by W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), pp. 447-85.

<sup>35</sup> For an account of late medieval and Reformation blood libel, cf. R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). On host-desecration accusations, cf. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, and Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, pp. 109-23. On the *Judensau*, cf. Isaiah Shachar, *The Judensau: a Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and its History* (London: Warburg Institute, 1974).

<sup>36</sup> These are discussed in Chapter Three.



belief in, or special knowledge of, Christ or the Cross.<sup>37</sup> These latter character behaviours will be referred to here as ‘benign.’ This term is used here broadly to distinguish these from more ‘hostile’ behaviours; a similar distinction is proposed by Rubin, discussing the host desecration accusation, when she refers to the Jew being depicted ‘as a witness, rather than as an abuser’.<sup>38</sup> The term ‘benign’ is not intended to imply that the Jewish characters in the tales are ever depicted, before their conversion, as being wholly helpful to Christians or to have an unambiguous Christian faith. Rather, to borrow the medical use of the term as it is applied to tumours, they are ‘benign’ in the sense of being relatively non-malignant.

A vital point to consider here is whether portrayals of Jews converting to Christianity or having some element of Christian belief can be said to constitute favourable portrayals in contrast to depictions of hostile Jews. Depictions of Jews as being friendly towards, or being converted to, Christianity have been seen by critics as tolerant or compassionate portrayals. Ann Eljenholm Nichols, discussing the host-desecration drama the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, stresses the ‘loving’ and ‘intimate’ response of the converted Jews who ‘beg for mercy’ when the tortured host miraculously becomes Christ: ‘by the end of the play the veil has been lifted from the Jews’ hearts; the Good Friday prayer has been answered’.<sup>39</sup> She comments in a footnote: ‘It is unfortunate that the issue of anti-semitism has so long dogged the Croxton play, for the poet’s charity is evident not simply in the conversion but also in the absence of offensive caricature.’<sup>40</sup> David Lawton comments that the Croxton play is ‘very unlike’ its analogues, in part because, ‘in all other versions, vengeance is taken at least on the Jewish male or males who torture [the Host], whereas in the English play they are forgiven and converted—indeed, they are represented as converting voluntarily rather than by force’.<sup>41</sup> He adds that, ‘The ending of the Croxton play is uniquely at odds with the active intolerance that generated such stories in the first place,’<sup>42</sup> and later, comparing the play to an altarpiece depicting Christian vengeance for an act of host desecration, comments: ‘The violence of

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<sup>37</sup> Tales of this kind are discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>38</sup> *Gentile Tales*, p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> ‘The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*: A Re-Reading,’ *Comparative Drama* 22.2 (1988) pp. 117-37, quotes pp. 129-30.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 61, p. 137.

<sup>41</sup> David Lawton, ‘Sacrilege and Theatricality: the Croxton Play of the Sacrament,’ p. 288.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

Uccello's predella is unremitting: not only the entire Jewish family but also the Christian woman complicit in the Host profanation are put to death, whereas Croxton is uniquely tender-hearted'.<sup>43</sup> Sherry Reames, discussing the *Legenda Aurea*, finds that although Jacobus' depiction of 'Christian life' may be 'adversarial', nonetheless 'anti-Semitism is not usually part of that picture'.<sup>44</sup> She cites Jacobus' account of James the Lesser as 'emphasiz[ing] the proofs of God's desire to save the Jews, rather than see them punished for rejecting Christ', adding, 'the message that Jews are human beings capable of redemption is reinforced elsewhere in the *Legenda* by Jacobus' tendency to retell stories in which they are converted, rather than condemned, by miracles'.<sup>45</sup>

The implication of these readings is that portrayals of Jews being punished differ significantly from portrayals of Jews being converted, with the latter being devoid of anti-Jewish content, and indeed examples of the 'charity' or 'tender-heartedness' of the authors. However, these perspectives do not sufficiently take into account the historical contexts that these narratives were either echoing or helping to create, such as the violence in pre-expulsion England and in Europe associated with host-desecration accusations,<sup>46</sup> the historical violence accompanying forced conversions, and the frequent choice between conversion and death offered to Jews at those periods.<sup>47</sup> The readings also avoid looking at the links between devotional and anti-Jewish narrative.<sup>48</sup> As Lawton suggests, medieval anti-Jewish legends that

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>44</sup> Reames, *The Legenda Aurea; a Reexamination of its Paradoxical History*, pp. 119-20.

<sup>45</sup> N. to ibid., p.262. *Legenda Aurea* chapter discussed is 'St James, Apostle,' GL I, pp. 269-77, LA, pp. 295-303.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*.

<sup>47</sup> Jakób Jocz notes: 'The fate of the Jews who had been forcibly baptized was more than tragic. At times of popular uprisings, Jews had often out of fear accepted baptism and allowed their children to be baptized. When persecution abated, however, they returned to their former faith. Newman records an instance of such lapsed Jews being imprisoned and excommunicated. After they had been kept for a year without recanting their error, the Inquisitors inquired of the Pope, Nicholas II, as to the further steps to be taken. The pope's answer was that they were to be treated as heretics, i.e. burned for continuous obstinacy.' Jakób Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: A Study in the Relationship Between the Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (London: SPCK, 1949), p. 89. Cf. also *The Jews and the Crusaders: the Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades*, trans. by Shlomo Eidelberg (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), for contemporary Jewish accounts of forced conversion.

<sup>48</sup> Ann Eljenholm Nichols cites Richard Homan's distinction between 'devotional art' and 'anti-semitic tales', and while she disagrees with his contention that the Croxton play's imagery belongs to the latter rather than to the former, like Homan she fails to note that religious imagery, ideas and language can be both devotional and anti-Jewish. Ann Eljenholm Nichols, 'The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*: A Re-Reading', *Comparative Drama*, 22.2 (1988), 117-37, n. 47, p. 135, citing Richard

do not end with conversion often end instead with the Jews being killed as punishment for some act of hostility or unbelief.<sup>49</sup> Yet, given that structurally, the two kinds of endings were to some extent interchangeable in this kind of narrative, and that historically, both conversion and violence could constitute oppressive anti-Jewish measures on the part of the larger Christian community, these perspectives can be seen to assume a greater distinction between medieval depictions of the condemnation of Jews on the one hand or conversion of Jews on the other than ought to be made.

In light of this, a similar qualification must be made regarding the distinction that is proposed in the present work between portrayals of Jews in 'hostile' versus 'benign' behavioural modes. This distinction differs somewhat from that in the above examples between punishment versus conversion of Jewish characters, since our distinction applies to the behaviour of the Jewish characters throughout the tale, rather than focusing primarily on the outcome. Nonetheless, it would similarly be possible to view depictions of 'hostile' or 'benign' behaviour of Jewish characters as reflecting, respectively, harsh or favourable attitudes towards Jews on the part of the tales' authors. This, however, should be avoided, since both the 'benign' and 'hostile' modes of the 'hermeneutical' Jew as constructed by early and medieval Christian ideology turn out, when examined, to have many elements in common.

Perhaps most importantly, both show the Jew as being highly reactive to Christianity. Sometimes, in the tales, 'hostile' Jews are moved to attack symbols of the faith, such as icons, and in these cases are often portrayed as re-enacting aspects of the original deicide of which Christianity accused them.<sup>50</sup> Yet even predominantly 'hostile' Jewish characters frequently display a desire to approach or to test Christian icons, behaving in ways that suggest at least a partial belief in Christian truths; they are generally entirely receptive to conversion post-miracle.<sup>51</sup> Jewish characters of a

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Homan, 'Devotional Themes in the Violence and Humor of the *Play of the Sacrament*', *Comparative Drama*, 20.4 (1986), 327-40, p. 338.

<sup>49</sup> For example, some of the versions of the legend upon which Chaucer based his 'Prioress' Tale', end with the conversion, and others, like Chaucer's, with the punishment, of the Jews. Brown, 'The Prioress' Tale', pp. 447-85. For the idea that the alternative between conversion and death is a standard narrative feature of medieval miracle tales involving Jews, I am indebted to Richard Wood.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. two short tales from 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross', *GL* II, pp. 170-1; *LA*, pp. 608-9, and 'The Assumption of the Holy Virgin', in which a Jew attacks Mary's bier, *GL* II, p. 81; *LA*, pp. 508-9. These tales are discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *ibid.*



predominantly 'benign' cast may, for their part, have a covert belief in the divinity of Christ, or invoke the protection of the cross.<sup>52</sup> Regardless of the exact form their behaviour takes, Jewish characters are consistently depicted as being drawn, even if at times somewhat unwillingly, towards Christianity.

Another factor that both behavioural modes have in common is that, as mentioned above, in those tales from the *Legenda Aurea* that feature both Jews and miracles, the miracles are brought about largely through the agency of the Jewish characters, regardless of whether the behaviour that triggers the miracle is of a 'hostile' or a 'benign' nature. Jewish miracle-tale characters in either mode can be assigned for present purposes to a single functional category, that of enablers, characters who facilitate the occurrence of a miracle. These Jewish 'enabler' characters are constructed as drawing their entire significance from their part, however motivated, in triggering miracles and thereby revealing Christian truths; from their help, where relevant, in reforming faulty Christian characters; and from their own eventual conversion to Christianity, typically occurring at the close of the tale.

Portrayals of Jews in both modes construct Jewish value according to the extent to which the Jewishness of the characters helps promote some Christian aim, and ultimately to the extent to which their Jewishness is convertible into Christianity. It thus becomes clear that the distinction between medieval literary portrayals of Jews as 'hostile' or 'benign', proposed above turns out to be less marked than it would first appear when reading the tales, and it should certainly not be easily assumed that it can serve as a means of distinguishing friendly from unfriendly medieval Christian portrayals of Jews. Indeed, given the functional similarity of tale characters displaying the different modes, it may be more accurate to think of these designations as representing ends of a continuum rather than truly distinct entities. Ultimately they are complementary aspects of one complex but not incoherent idea of the Jew that constructs Jews as being significant, for good or for ill, only in relation to Christianity and not autonomously.

Nonetheless, the hostile/benign distinction is cautiously retained here despite these serious qualifications, because it remains relevant when looking at the themes

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. 'The Finding of the Holy Cross', *GL* I, pp. 277-84; *LA*, pp. 303-11, and an episode from 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross', *GL* II, pp. 172-3; *LA*, pp. 609-11.

associated with these modes of behaviour as depicted in medieval texts. The 'hostile' behavioural mode evokes, for example, the role Jews played in the killing of Christ, while the 'benign' mode may reflect the Pauline idea of Christianity being offered 'to the Jew first' (Rom. 1. 16), the idea of a secret tradition concerning Christ passed down in Jewish families, or another Pauline formula, regarding the conversion of Israel (Rom. 11. 23-27). Thus it is helpful to look at the behavioural modes separately; Chapter Three looks primarily at the 'hostile' mode and Chapter Four at the 'benign'. An important caveat, however, is that these modes inevitably overlap, so that there will not necessarily be an exclusive way of depicting characters in the different tales, with entirely 'hostile' behaviour portrayed in some, and entirely 'benign' behaviour in others. Rather, the tales discussed in Chapter Three put more emphasis on the 'hostile' mode, and those in Chapter Four on the 'benign' mode, while the Jewish disputants of the tale of Silvester, discussed in Chapter Five, fit less easily into either mode, excepting the somewhat malevolent Zambri the magician.<sup>53</sup>

Given that these behavioural character modes may refer back to the Crucifixion as well as forward to the conversion of the Jews, it is not surprising that, where Jews appear in Christian legend, they evoke both past and future moments of time. Indeed, it is most helpful when looking at the Jewish characters in the *Legenda* tales to see them as engaging with the entire span of biblical history, from creation to Judgement. Jacobus' remarks in his preface to the *Legenda* concerning time make it apparent that he intends his work to refer to aspects of time that transcend the particular moment in which a given tale is set. In his prologue, Jacobus begins by setting out four periods of Christian history: the time of turning from the right way, from Adam to Moses, corresponding to the period in the Church calendar from Septuagesima to Easter; the time of renewal, from Moses to Christ, corresponding to the period from Advent until Christmas; the time of reconciliation, corresponding to the period between Easter and Pentecost; and the time of pilgrimage, representing the 'present life of man',<sup>54</sup> corresponding to the period from the octave of Pentecost until the beginning of Advent. Jacobus explains which portions of the Bible are to be read at each season; respectively, Genesis, the story of the fall, Isaiah, in which the prophets inspire a renewal of faith, Revelation, representing the mystery of the

<sup>53</sup> Cf. 'St Silvester,' *GL* I, pp. 65-71; *LA*, pp. 73-9.

<sup>54</sup> *GL* I, p. 3.

‘reconciliation by Christ’, and Kings and Maccabees, whose accounts of war serve the purpose of ‘reminding us of our own spiritual struggles’.<sup>55</sup>

The fourfold division of history is also related to the cycle of the seasons and to the divisions of the day (night, morning, midday and evening). All of this underscore that the saints’ lives of the *Legenda Aurea* are themselves related to the days, seasons, years and ultimately to the entire framework of Christian time, since they are ‘assembled [...] within the framework of the Church’s liturgical calendar’,<sup>56</sup> according to the feast days of the saints, and the liturgical calendar is a microcosm of the whole of Christian history. The readings assigned to the sections of the Christian year tie these recurring moments to particular past or future moments of Christian history, with the effect of linking the different layers of time. Jacobus thus situates his tales within a vastly complex temporal structure that is at once cyclical and linear. As we shall see in Chapters Three to Five, the treatment of Jews in the *Legenda Aurea* is profoundly evocative of the many-layered temporality within which Jacobus conceives his work.

When we consider the *Legenda*’s possible didactic function, it is significant that all of the modes of time referenced by Jacobus also correspond to some aspect of the present moment, whether in terms of the medieval ‘now’ (‘the present life of man’) the ‘now’ of the Church calendar’s recurring feast days, the personal ‘now’ (‘our own spiritual struggles’) and the connection, often left implicit, between events in time and the values of eternity, where God exists in an eternal present. This may help explain how narratives about Jewish hostility could influence interactions between medieval Christian and Jewish communities. Historically speaking, medieval Jews were linked with the cyclical Church calendar, due to medieval Christian beliefs that Jews were especially prone to re-enact deicidal violence at certain seasons; blood libel stories and anti-Jewish violence could be associated with Christian feasts like Easter and Corpus Christi.<sup>57</sup> Narratives such as those in the *Legenda* and later blood libel and host-desecration stories re-created elements of the Passion, but with the events transposed to the Middle Ages, images or symbols substituted for Christ’s historical body, and medieval Jewish characters taking the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ryan, introduction to the *Golden Legend*, GL I, p. xv.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, pp. 48 and 72.

role of Christ's torturers.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that such narratives were able to make the Passion and Crucifixion come alive by presenting them in a familiar contemporary setting, with the effect of suggesting that the events of the gospels were in some sense still active, still taking place. Yet, ironically, if a crucial element in the idea of the hostile Jew committing violence against Christianity is the sense that the events of Christ's passion are still being enacted in the present, this very sense relegates medieval Jews to a moment in the past. For medieval Christians, observant Jews were meant to have been left behind by the coming of Christ, and to be locked into a past at once insufficient (in their non-recognition of the new era) and idealised (in that their religion had been preserved in stasis to act as a witness to the Israelite heritage of Christianity). Unable to progress due to their own obstinacy, Jews in medieval Christian legend were a signifier that eternally referred back to the moment of deicide, a crime they were believed to be moved to re-create in the present day.

Miracle tales in which crosses or images of Christ and the saints came alive, manifested presence and reacted to the Jews who reacted to them created a legendary space that fused past and present. Within that space, the Jew enacted a recurring drama, perpetually going through the motions of creating miracles that highlighted the perceived deficiencies of Judaism, and ultimately either dying or, more commonly, being reborn, trading his or her Jewish identity for a Christian one. Through the pattern of death and rebirth undergone by the Jewish characters, every time a tale was told, the birth of Christianity itself from a Jewish matrix would be symbolically re-enacted. Thus, the mythical Jew was a vital figure in early and medieval Christian legend, reiterating a sense of Christian identity grounded in pre-Christian Judaism, yet at the same time being constructed in the Christian era as a somewhat dangerous, potentially assimilable, but essentially inferior other.

This study seeks to engage with the transformations of this mythical Jew in the *Legenda* tales. Chapters One and Two contain background material helpful for the subsequent discussion of the tales themselves. Chapter One is an overview of ways in which early and medieval Christianity constructed the mythical Jew, and explores some of the inherent paradoxes contained within Christian attitudes.

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<sup>58</sup> A clear example is the Jews inflicting the tortures of Christ's Passion on the Eucharist in the Croxton 'Play of the Sacrament'. Also cf. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, pp. 141-3 and 170, and Hsia, *Ritual Murder*, pp. 55-6.

Chapter Two explores the persuasive use of miracle in early and medieval narratives, and examines some of the mechanics of medieval miracles, with particular reference to the phenomenon of miracles associated with relic and icon worship. The final three chapters consist of close reading of the selected tales. Chapter Three looks at tales in which Jews attack Christians or Christian icons, and the ideas about the hostile Jew that these tales draw upon. Chapter Four looks at tales in which Jews evince some degree of knowledge of or faith in Christ or the cross, and how this can be related to the idea of Jews as witnesses of the truth of Christianity. Chapter Five concentrates on the tale of a disputation between St. Silvester and a group of Jews, comparing it to similar early tales that follow a disputation with a miracle, and to real disputations between Christians and Jews in thirteenth-century Europe.

A note on the terminology used here when referring to anti-Jewish rhetoric and behaviour: it is necessary to engage with Gavin Langmuir's redefinition of the terms 'anti-Judaism' and 'antisemitism'. Langmuir has argued that the term 'antisemitism' should be used for a kind of prejudice that he traces back to 'northern Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries'.<sup>59</sup> He accepts the term 'anti-Judaism' to refer to negative attitudes towards Jews before that time: 'a total or partial opposition to Judaism – and to Jews as adherents of it – by people who accept a competing system of beliefs and practices and consider certain genuine Judaic beliefs and practices as inferior.'<sup>60</sup> What he prefers to call 'antisemitism' consists rather of 'irrational fantasies about Jews', such as 'accusations of ritual murder, host profanation, and well-poisoning', dating from about the twelfth century: 'In 1150, for the first time in the Middle Ages, Jews were accused of conspiring to crucify Christian children [...]'<sup>61</sup> Langmuir feels that the emergence and spread of this kind of fantastic medieval Christian narrative about Jews alters the nature of anti-Jewish sentiment to the extent that adopting the term 'antisemitism' for this new phenomenon is justified:

By the end of the thirteenth century, irrational fantasies about Jews were widespread [...] accusations of ritual murder, host profanation, and well-

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<sup>59</sup> Gavin Langmuir, *Towards a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.



poisoning would arouse people to massacre thousands of Jews. In addition to anti-Judaism, antisemitism had become part of medieval culture.<sup>62</sup>

Langmuir is clearly correct in finding the late medieval emergence of blood libel, host desecration narratives and similar grotesque and irrational fantasies about Jews a radical development of anti-Jewish attitudes. However, there are problems in adopting his terminology in the present work. This is partly because the subject of the present work is not ritual murder or host desecration narratives, but tales from the *Legenda* that do not include such narratives. In many cases the *Legenda* tales represent reworkings of earlier sources, and, perhaps due to tale origins predating the rise of the blood libel narrative, no tales concerning blood libel are included, while the appearance of the *Legenda* itself predates the late thirteenth-fourteenth century rise of the host desecration narrative.<sup>63</sup> What do occur in the *Legenda* are tales of icon desecration by Jews, and these show enough resemblance to the later ritual murder and host-desecration narratives to be significant, particularly when the icon manifests supernatural bleeding, a sign that Christ's body is present and suffering under Jewish attack. In Chapter Two a tentative argument is put forth that icon-desecration tales, which seem to predate most of the host-desecration and ritual murder tales, perhaps by some centuries, can usefully be seen as less-developed precursors to these later tales.

Thus, for present purposes, a continuity between early and late medieval themes in the mythical treatment of Jews, as well as a difference, needs to be stressed. Indeed, even when the subject of discussion is blood libel or host desecration narrative, it can be useful to look at literary precursors and elements present in these kinds of narrative that tie in with much older aspects of anti-Jewish theology and attitudes. For these reasons, in the present work the term antisemitism will be avoided, unless authors who use the term are being cited. Instead, the term 'anti-Jewish' will be used here to describe negative attitudes towards Jews. This helps distance the subject matter from the more modern connotations, for example of the Holocaust, that inevitably attach to the terms 'antisemitic' and 'antisemitism'

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, pp. 1, 35-9 and 40ff., and Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, p. 114.

today. When the term occurs in citations of other authors, whatever spelling is used by that author (e.g. antisemitism, anti-Semitism), will be retained.

It is difficult to know exactly what biblical texts were being used by the early and medieval writers this study quotes, but since versions of the Vulgate are a likely source for much of this period, the Douay-Rheims bible has been used here for quotations, to give a flavour of the Vulgate, rather than a later version like the King James bible.

## Chapter One: The Imagined Jew

Representations of Jews in medieval Christian miracle tales draw upon a complex set of Christian attitudes towards Jews, formed and elaborated over centuries. From the inception of Christianity, apologists and theologians took as one of their main subjects the relation between their new religion and Judaism. The Church fathers presented Christianity as a 'transvalued Judaism'<sup>1</sup> in which aspects of Jewish religiosity were interpreted as proofs of Christian faith. In their attempts to fit historical and contemporary Jewry into Christian models, these writers were creating what Jeremy Cohen calls the 'hermeneutical Jew.'<sup>2</sup> This is an imagined 'Jew' who is 'constructed in the discourse of Christian theology, and above all in Christian theologians' interpretation of Scripture.'<sup>3</sup> The Jewish characters who appear in medieval miracle tales, although not the products of theological discourse per se, nonetheless also constitute 'hermeneutical Jews'; that is, they are ideological representations within which assorted Christian theses regarding the 'Jew' may be discerned.

The hermeneutical Jew could never be a simple figure. In early Christian writings, representations of Jews needed to fulfil two contradictory functions. The first of these was to establish a distinct identity for Christianity by distinguishing it from Judaism. Apologists for the new faith thus sought to marginalise those Jews who, after Christ, rejected Christianity and continued to adhere to Judaism, portraying Jews as inferior to Christians, being at best ignorant of the truth of Christianity, and at worst deicides and persecutors or corrupters of Christians. Yet the second, and rather paradoxical, function of early Christian writings about Jews was to affirm that despite having been made obsolete, or worse, blasphemous, by the advent of Christianity, Judaism still held some value in Christian terms. As John

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Living Letters of the Law*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.



Hood points out, the Jewish context was initially, and remained, an essential part of Christianity:

[Jesus's] messianic claims, his scriptural quotations and allusions, his attacks on the Pharisees and temple priests, and his sacrificial death are all intelligible only in terms of Jewish history and scripture. Nor is it possible to accept Jesus as Messiah without also believing in the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic monarchy, and the divine inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the early Christian apologists, followed by St Augustine, argued that the Hebrew scriptures had been created as part of the divine plan leading to the advent of Christ, and thus contained prophecies which related to Christ.

Taking this position meant giving the Jewish writings a central and irrefutable place in Christian thought and practice. However, apologists were eager not to present Christianity as simply a new variety of Judaism. The task of the earliest Christian apologists was to establish the doctrine of supersession, according to which Christ is the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy, and Christianity the inheritor of Jewish scripture and the legitimate successor to Judaism, the 'true spiritual Israel'.<sup>5</sup> This idea was often difficult for non-Christians, both Jewish and pagan, to understand properly, if one can judge by the perplexity with which the relationship between the faiths is questioned by the non-Christian interlocutors in the dialogues of the apologists: one such, Justin Martyr's Jewish character 'Trypho', is made to exclaim, 'Do you mean to say [...] that you are Israel, and that God says all this about you?'<sup>6</sup>

The writings of St. Paul were a key source of the supersession doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Paul's writings were and remained highly influential texts as far as attitudes to Jews were concerned, partly because of St. Augustine's interest in Paul, and Augustine's

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<sup>4</sup> John Y. B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Justin Martyr says of Christians, 'We have been led to God through this crucified Christ, and we are the true spiritual Israel [...]' Justin Martyr, 'Dialogue with Trypho', in *Saint Justin Martyr: The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy or the Rule of God*, trans. by Thomas B. Falls, Fathers of the Church 6 (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1948), pp. 139-366, Ch. 11, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 123, p. 339.

<sup>7</sup> Hood finds four salient aspects of Paul's position regarding the Jews: the primacy of the Jews' status as recipients of the Law, the limitations of the Law, supersession of the Law by the revelation of Christ, and the eventual conversion of the Jews. *Aquinas and the Jews*, pp. 4-6. On supersession, cf. Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), e.g. pp. 31-2, 140-1.

own huge influence on later thinkers. The ambiguities and ambivalence of Paul's writings became a part of the received Christian attitudes towards Jews. Paul presents Old Testament lawgivers and prophets as central figures of the new sect, and associates them with righteousness and virtue. Calling Israelites 'my kinsmen', he characterises them as the people

to whom belongeth the adoption as of children, and the glory, and the testament, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises: Whose are the fathers, and of whom is Christ [...] (Rom. 9. 4-5).

Paul emphasises that Christianity was first offered to the Jews, calling the Gospel 'the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and to the Greek' (Rom. 1. 16). His statement that 'all Israel' would be saved after the Gentiles had embraced Christ (Rom. 11. 25-6) meant that, however they might be anathematised, Jews retained some kind of place in the Christian order of things. Paul's metaphor of the olive tree (Rom. 11. 16-24), in which the original branches are the Jewish people, while Gentiles are new branches grafted onto the tree, represents Jews as the chosen race of God. At the same time, it implies that Gentiles can learn to serve God better than the Jews, by embracing the faith in Christ which the Jews had rejected. Paul stresses that one need not be a genetic descendant of Abraham in order to be saved: 'For it is not he is [sic] a Jew, who is so outwardly; nor is that circumcision which is outwardly in the flesh: But he is a Jew, that is one inwardly [...]' (Rom. 2. 28-9).

Paul's doctrine of 'inwardness' made initiation into the Christian sect accessible to Gentiles without conversion to the established forms of Judaism. His missionary rhetoric (leaving aside his Epistle to the Hebrews), usually takes pains to point out that Christianity is not an exclusively Jewish sect. Christ is available to all: 'For there is no distinction of the Jew and the Greek: for the same is Lord over all, rich unto all that call upon him' (Rom. 10. 12). Yet Paul stresses that the Jews' adherence to Mosaic law prevents them from benefiting from the new dispensation: '[...] Israel, by following after the law of justice, is not come unto the law of justice' (Rom. 9. 31). Indeed, the Jews are 'blinded' and insensible, (Rom. 11. 7-8), and these faults allow an opportunity for the Gentiles to be saved and set the Jews a good

example (Rom. 11. 11). Paul even accuses the Jews of the ultimate crime of deicide: 'the Jews [...] both killed the Lord Jesus, and the prophets, and have persecuted us, and please not God, and are adversaries to all men [...]' (I Thessalonians 2. 14-15). Paul's formulations, which constructed Jews as the first recipients of Christianity but also as outside the Christian pale, were glossed and expanded on by Patristic and scholastic writers, and became the basis for medieval anti-Jewish polemic over the following one and a half millennia. In particular, as we shall see, miracle tales that depicted Jews as having some kind of innate or inherited knowledge of the truth of Christianity relied ultimately upon the Pauline formula of 'to the Jew first'.

The first-century apologist Justin Martyr reiterates Paul's accusation of Jewish 'blindness', relating it to the Jews' inability to grasp the spiritual sense of their own writings. Justin comments on Psalm 22,<sup>8</sup> a source for gospel accounts of the crucifixion, which describes the martyrdom, though not the death, of the narrator, whose tormentors, like Christ's, 'cast lots' for his clothing,<sup>9</sup> and which is the source of the familiar lines from Matthew 27. 46 and Mark 15. 34, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'. Justin reads the allusions to Jewish scripture as proof that Jesus was the Christ foretold by the prophets:

David [...] refers to His passion on the cross in mystical parable: 'They have pierced My hands and feet [...] They parted My garments amongst them, and upon My vesture they cast lots.' For, when they nailed Him to the cross they did indeed pierce His hands and feet, and they who crucified Him divided His garments among themselves, each casting lots for the garment he chose. You are indeed blind when you deny that the above-quoted Psalm was spoken of Christ, for you fail to see that no one among your people who was ever called King ever had his hands and feet pierced while alive, and died by this mystery (that is, of the cross), except this Jesus only.<sup>10</sup>

Following Paul, Justin asserted that his Jewish contemporaries were failing to read scripture on an inward, or allegorical level; hence his insistence that Jews were 'blind' in failing to recognise that the advent of Christ was 'predicted mysteriously'

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<sup>8</sup> In the Greek numbering system, in use before the Reformation, this is Psalm 21, but modern Bibles list it as Psalm 22, according to the Hebrew numbering.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. 21. 19 in the Douay-Rheims Bible. Cf. Matt. 27. 35, Mark 15. 24, Luke 23. 34, and John 19. 24.

<sup>10</sup> 'Dialogue with Trypho', 97, pp. 300-301.

in scripture.<sup>11</sup> From the time of Justin throughout the middle ages, Jews would be depicted as ‘blind’ in this sense. A related accusation was that Jews were carnal, not spiritual, in that they adhered to the letter and not the spirit of their own writings, from which they were consequently unable to benefit.<sup>12</sup> These standard topoi of medieval anti-Judaism were initially used as a way of reinforcing the claim that Christians, rather than those Jews who continued to adhere to Mosaic law and to reject Christ, were *Verus Israel*, the legitimate inheritors of Jewish religiosity.

This claim showed that, although they maintained that contemporary Jews were defective in understanding, the first Christians did not wish to be seen as utterly renouncing the legacy of Judaism. The work of the early Christian apologists was shaped by a need to secure a place for the emerging religion within a pagan world which prized antiquity and distrusted innovation, as Robert L. Wilken suggests:

In the minds of Greeks and Romans, the Jews were an ancient people whose way of life commanded respect. In the ancient world, the older a religious tradition, the more authority it commanded [...]. From its beginnings, Christianity was branded an ‘innovation,’ a latecomer, an upstart sect that had abandoned the ways of the ancients to follow its own novelties.<sup>13</sup>

The opinions of the pagan author Celsus, quoted in Origen, bear out these remarks, citing the maintenance of Jewish tradition approvingly:

Now the Jews became an individual nation, and made laws according to the custom of their country; and they maintain these laws among themselves at the present day, and observe a worship which may be very peculiar but is at least traditional. In this respect they behave like the rest of mankind, because each nation follows its traditional customs, whatever kind may happen to be established [...] It is impious to abandon the customs which have been established in each locality from the beginning.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 100, p. 303.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Justin says to Trypho the Jew, ‘You [...] understand everything in a carnal way, and you deem yourselves pious if you perform [ritual] deeds, even when your souls are filled with deceit and every kind of sin’. Ibid., 14, p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> Origen, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: CUP, 1965, 1980), 5.25, p. 283.

Celsus says that if Christians were asked ‘who is the author of their traditional laws’, they would say ‘Nobody’. He goes on,

In fact, they themselves originated from Judaism, and they cannot name any other source for their teacher [...]. Nevertheless, they rebelled against the Jews.<sup>15</sup>

Celsus appreciates the ambivalence of the Christian claim, but puts it in an unflattering light, and his summary represents the kind of viewpoint that the apologists’ insistence on the doctrine of supersession was designed to counter.

In his *Apologeticus*, addressed to the pagans, Tertullian displays a political understanding of the Christian position as stated by Celsus, and is open about the need to present Christianity as the final flowering of an ancient religion. He is aware, he says, that pagans ‘are always praising antiquity’.<sup>16</sup> He claims authority for the Hebrew writings on the grounds of their antiquity, pointing out that the oldest pagan writings are ‘less ancient than the work of a single prophet’.<sup>17</sup> He admits that Christianity, as a comparatively recent religion, may be thought to be hiding under ‘shadow of an illustrious religion, one which has at any rate undoubted allowance of the law’,<sup>18</sup> especially since Christians appear different from Jews in being uncircumcised, failing to keep Jewish sacred days or follow dietary prohibitions. Against this he argues that Christians do not differ from Jews concerning God, that the Jews, once favoured by God, are scattered for their sin, and that this was foretold in their own writings; Jews differ from Christians only in that they still expect the messiah.<sup>19</sup>

Some of these arguments later form the basis of the ‘witness’ doctrine of St. Augustine. Writing in the late fourth to early fifth centuries, Augustine was to be vastly influential throughout the medieval period in his summation of the role of the Jews in the Christian philosophy of history. Much of his work is based on his reading

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 5.33, p. 289.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Apologeticus’, in *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianis*, ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Christian Library 11, 15 and 18, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Clark, 1869-70), II (ANCL 15, 1870) pp. 53-140 (4, p. 66).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 19, p. 89

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 21, p. 91

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-3

of Paul, following Paul's formulation that the true 'Jew' is designated by inward or mystical understanding (which for Paul would mean faith in Christ) rather than obedience to Mosaic law.<sup>20</sup> In this analysis he follows Justin and the early fathers. Augustine's writings on Jews often took the form of anti-heretical polemics, and perhaps served as well as a way of rationalising the seemingly inexplicable survival of a Jewish community that refused to honour the new dispensation.

Augustine's seminal and most often cited contribution to the debate on Jews is his doctrine of Jewish witness, *testimonium veritatis*. The value of Jews as 'witnesses' to Christian truth, important for an understanding of these tales, was for Augustine bound up with the Jewish scriptures, which Christians insisted contained prophecies of Christ and which were of genuine antiquity. These scriptures thus provided proof of Christian truth and gave value to the continued existence of the Jewish people: 'For what else is this nation now but a desk for the Christians, bearing the law and the prophets, and testifying to the doctrine of the Church, so that we honour in the sacrament what they disclose in the letter?' (*Quid est enim aliud hodieque gens ipsa, nisi quaedam scriniaria Christianorum, bajulans Legem et Prophetas ad testimonium assertionis Ecclesiae, ut nos honoremus per sacramentum, quod nuntiat illa per litteram?*).<sup>21</sup> The 'proofs' contained in the prophets are all the more telling because they are in the possession of the Jews, proving that the Christians had not fabricated them; furthermore, since the Jews are enemies of Christ, they cannot be accused of collaboration.<sup>22</sup>

Augustine's 'witness' concept relates also to the role played by Jews, who, as the chosen race in Christian salvific history, were the prophets of Christ, and from whom Christian knowledge of Christ is derived:

<sup>20</sup> Romans 2. 28-9: 'For it is not he is [sic] a Jew, who is so outwardly; nor is that circumcision which is outwardly in the flesh: But he is a Jew, that is one inwardly; and the circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God'.

<sup>21</sup> 'Reply to Faustus the Manichaean', in *St. Augustin: The Writings Against the Manichaeans and Against the Donatists: I, Writings in Connection with the Manichaean Controversy*, trans. by Richard Stothert, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 4, ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 151-345 (12.23, p. 191). *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, PL 42, (Paris: Migne, 1865), cols 13-804 (col.266).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 13.10, p. 203, 16.21, p. 227; Latin, *ibid.*, cols 287-8, 329. Also cf. Paula Fredriksen, 'Xcaecati Occulta Justitia Dei: Augustine on Jews and Judaism', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3.3 (1995), 299-324, and Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 29.



This very name of Christ [Hebrew ‘*Mashiah*’, ‘Anointed One’] is known to us only from the Jews, who, in their application of it to their kings and priests, were not individually, but nationally [i.e., as a nation] prophets of Christ and Christ’s kingdom. (*Nomenque ipsum Christi [...] non scimus nisi in regno Judaeorum in sacerdotibus et regibus institutum, ut non solum ille aut ille homo, sed universa ipsa gens totumque regnum propheta fieret Christi christianique regni.*)<sup>23</sup>

Augustine’s statement that the messianic concept and Christ’s very title derive from the priestly and ruling elite of the Jews, and that the Jewish people as a whole are ‘prophet[s] of [...] Christ’s kingdom’, represent an attitude towards the Jews on the part of early and medieval Christian writers that informs the behaviour of Jewish characters in the miracle tales. This passage has particular relevance to later narratives such as the legend of ‘The Finding of the Holy Cross’, which is discussed in Chapter Four.<sup>24</sup> In this tale, the Jews are the only ones who know the location where Christ’s cross is buried, owing to secret knowledge about Christ passed down from father to son, a literary representation of the idea of *testimonium veritatis*. In other tales from the *Legenda*, discussed in Chapter Three, even Jewish characters who exhibit hostile behaviour towards Christianity may, in their desire to inflict wounds and indignities upon images of Christ, be seen as displaying a partial belief that Christ is indeed present in these objects. Miri Rubin points out a similar belief regarding host-desecration accusations: ‘Jews were simultaneously seen as believers in Christ’s presence in the host and inflictors of harm upon that presence [...] in inflicting pain on the host, the Jews are taken to believe that it is indeed a worthy recipient of injury’.<sup>25</sup> In their roles as witnesses and quasi-believers, Jewish miracle-tale characters can be seen as outgrowths in a literary form of the theological formulations of Augustine.

The temporal structure within which Augustine situates the Jews is vital for an understanding the role of Jews in the *Legenda Aurea* tales, themselves situated, as we have seen,<sup>26</sup> within a complex web of temporal references. In his writings, Augustine situates the Jews within his conception of Christian history, insisting on

<sup>23</sup> ‘Reply to Faustus’, 13.4, p. 200; *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, PL 42, col. 283.

<sup>24</sup> *GL* I, pp. 277-284; *LA*, pp. 303-11.

<sup>25</sup> *Gentile Tales*, p. 99. Cf. also the discussion of icons in Chapter Two.

<sup>26</sup> Discussed in the Introduction.

the virtue of the Jewish Law for those who had followed it during the Old Testament period, which constituted the first five ages or 'days' of his sevenfold division of history.<sup>27</sup> This formulation also is significant for the 'Finding of the Holy Cross' tale, mentioned above, which makes many implicit statements about the role of the Jews at significant moments of Christian history. The defining moment marking the change from the time when the old law could be followed in its 'literal' sense, as in the practices of Judaism, was of course the advent of Christ. In the sixth, Christian age, the Christian sacraments represent the inwardness of the law and have superseded the letter:

The difference is not in the doctrine, but in the time. There was a time when it was proper that these things should be figuratively predicted; and there is now a different time, when it is proper that they should be openly declared and fully accomplished. It is not surprising that the Jews, who understood the Sabbath in a carnal sense, should oppose Christ, who began to open up its spiritual meaning. (*Non ergo diversa doctrina est, sed diversum tempus. Aliud enim erat, quo haec oportebat per figuratas prophetias praenuntiari; et aliud est, quo haec jam oportet per manifestam veritatem redditamque adimpleri. Sed quid mirum si Judaei carnaliter intelligentes sabbatum, Christo, qui jam hoc spiritualiter insinuabat, repugnaverunt?*)<sup>28</sup>

For Augustine, Christ's own obedience to the law signified his submission to divine will, but also marked that moment at which the law began to be obeyed in its spiritual sense, as Justin and Tertullian had noted, with, for example, 'circumcision of the heart' replacing bodily circumcision.<sup>29</sup> Mosaic law, once the commandment of God, is now adhered to only by the scattered remnant of Israel, tolerated because they provide testimony to the truth of Christianity.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> 'Reply to Faustus,' 16.28, pp. 230-231; *PL* 42, col. 334.

<sup>29</sup> St. Paul had said, '[...] he is a Jew, that is one inwardly; and the circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter [...]' (Rom. 2. 29). Justin cites the phrase in 'Dialogue with Trypho', Chs 113-4, pp. 323-4, and Ch. 28, p. 189. However, this idea of spiritual circumcision does not originate with Christian criticism of Jewish carnality. It comes from the Old Testament: cf. Deut. 10. 16 and 30. 6, Jer. 4. 4 and 9. 26 and Ezekiel 44. 7. The phrase also occurs in material from the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the Habakkuk Pesher, col. 11, ll. 12-14, cited in Robert Eisenman, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Christians* (Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element, 1996), pp. 412-3. For Philo's definition of non-literal circumcision, cf. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, p. 26. For an Islamic parallel, cf. Brooke Olson Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns: The Legacy of the Mi'raj in the Formation of Islam* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), regarding the opening and cleansing of Mohammed's breast, pp.



Yet Augustine's partial tolerance of Jewish life and practice does not constitute a pro-Judaic attitude or one that is truly tolerant in any modern sense. The survival of Jews and Jewish religiosity can be tolerated because it can be shown to fit the scheme of salvation history:

Not by bodily death shall the ungodly race of carnal Jews perish. For whoever destroys them in this way shall suffer sevenfold vengeance, that is, shall bring upon himself the sevenfold penalty under which the Jews lie for the crucifixion of Christ. So to the end of the seven days of time, the continued preservation of the Jews will be a proof to believing Christians of the subjection merited by those who, in the pride of their kingdom, put the Lord to death. (*Non corporali morte interibit genus impium carnalium Judaeorum. Quicumque enim eos ita perdiderit, septem vindictas exsolvet; id est, auferet ab eis septem vindictas, quibus alligati sunt propter reatum occisi Christi; ut hoc toto tempore quod septenario dierum numero volvitur, quia non interit gens Judaea, satis appareat fidelibus Christianis, quam subjectionem meruerint, qui superbo regno Dominum interfecerunt.*)<sup>30</sup>

For Augustine, the Jews are outcasts from the heavenly kingdom for the sin of pride and for deicide. They are also outcasts from their earthly kingdom, without a homeland, scattered throughout Christendom.<sup>31</sup> Having only a carnal understanding of the nature of things, they lack self-determined purpose and are now a subject race, serving only as a moral message to Christians and a proof of Christianity to heretics and outsiders.<sup>32</sup> Any tolerance or forbearance toward the Jews is delimited by these parameters.

Even the limited tolerance proposed by Augustine was not shared by all of his contemporaries. Augustine's metaphor of 'desks for the Christians' makes a telling contrast with John Chrysostom's vehement complaint against the synagogue. Chrysostom followed early apologetic practice in denying that Jews were able to understand their sacred literature, but added that he found them all the more guilty of rejecting Christ because of their access to the words of the prophets. 'If they did not

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18-25. Some versions of the story include the removal of a black spot or blood clot, the 'portion of Satan' (p. 21), while others involve the washing away of doubt, other religious beliefs or error (p. 24).

<sup>30</sup> 'Reply to Faustus,' 12.12, pp. 187-8; *PL* 42, cols 260-1.

<sup>31</sup> *De Civitate Dei* 18.46, cited in Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Cohen, pp. 35-6.

have the prophets,' he wrote, 'they would not deserve such punishment; if they had not read the sacred books, they would not be so unclean and so unholy [...] they [are] all the more profane and blood-guilty: they have the prophets, but they treat them with hostile hearts.'<sup>33</sup> Chrysostom dwells on the evils rather than the benefits of the continued use of scripture within Judaism: as he says, Jews 'read the sacred writings but reject their witness – and this is a mark of men guilty of the greatest outrage.'<sup>34</sup> In addition, the presence of 'sacred books' deceives Christians into considering the temple to be holy.<sup>35</sup>

In Chrysostom's mind, 'Judaising' – the practice of Jewish customs by non-Jews – constituted a threat to the purity of the Christian faith. In the early Christian period, there was at times no clear distinction between the religions in the public mind, and the existence of individuals or groups practising a hybrid Christian-Jewish religiosity was a problem for certain Patristic writers.<sup>36</sup> In the second century, Justin Martyr had thought it permissible, though not advisable, for Christians to continue to follow Mosaic law so long as they did not proselytise:

[I]f some [Jewish converts], due to their instability of will, desire to observe as many of the Mosaic precepts as possible – precepts which we think were instituted because of your hardness of heart – while at the same time they place their hope in Christ, and if they wish to live with [...] Christians and believers [...] not persuading them to be circumcised like themselves, or to keep the Sabbath, or to perform any other similar acts, then it is my opinion that we Christians should receive them and associate with them in every way as kinsmen and brethren.<sup>37</sup>

Though he was against proselytising by Jews or Christians who followed the precepts of Jewish law, Justin thought that any Christians who had been thereby convinced to follow Mosaic Law, but without renouncing Christ, might be saved. In

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<sup>33</sup> *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, 1.5.6, p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.5.2, p.19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.5.2, pp. 18-19; 1.5.8, p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Wilken, Chapter 3, 'The Attraction of Judaism', pp. 66-94, especially the section 'Jewish Christians and Judaizing Christians,' pp. 68-73. Wilken describes a situation in which Jews and Christians often formed two discrete and mutually antagonistic groups, yet there also existed 'Jewish Christians', whom Wilken characterises as 'Jews who believe in Jesus yet continue to observe Jewish law', whereas 'Judaizing Christians' are 'those Christians [...] who [...] adopted certain aspects of Jewish law' (p. 70). The latter, who identified as Christians but in some respects practised as Jews, were the more disruptive, as they associated with Gentiles and caused divisions in the Church (p. 72).

the fourth century, Chrysostom, as we have seen, shared none of this partial tolerance for Judaizing, even saying in one of his sermons directed against Judaizing Christians, 'If any of you [...] observe any [...] Jewish ritual great or small, I call heaven and earth as my witnesses that I am guiltless of the blood of all of you.'<sup>38</sup>

Over the following centuries, even if the likelihood of Christians being drawn to emulate Jewish practices may have diminished, Christian rulers, clerics and lawgivers continued to express concerns about the deleterious effect on Christians of contact with Jews. Jews were seen to endanger the purity of the Corpus Christi, with anxieties relating to speech, food and sex, all of which carried the risk of physical or mental pollution. Stephen IV complained in 770 that the Jews of Narbonne had Christian slaves living with them who were in danger from their 'vile speech.'<sup>39</sup> In the ninth century Agobard of Lyons worried about the alleged Jewish capture of Christian slaves and violation of Christian women as well as issues of fraternisation and food-sharing between Jews and Christians.<sup>40</sup> In the eleventh century, Guibert of Nogent associated Judaizing with heresy, and portrayed Jews as corrupters of Christians; contact with Jews led to Christians committing such deeds as murder and blasphemy, and following foul and degraded ways of life.<sup>41</sup> In the high medieval period, tolerance of Jewish communities was increasingly threatened by fears of contamination from unbelievers in the midst of Christian Europe. Writing to Louis VII at the time of the second crusade, Peter of Cluny asked, 'Of what use is it to go forth to seek the enemies of Christendom in distant lands if the blasphemous Jews, who are much worse than the Saracens, are permitted in our very midst to scoff with impunity at Christ and the Sacrament!'<sup>42</sup> Even when actual anti-Jewish violence was

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<sup>37</sup> 'Dialogue with Trypho', Ch. 47, pp. 218-9.

<sup>38</sup> *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, 1.8.1, pp. 31-2.

<sup>39</sup> Stow, *Alienated Minority*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>41</sup> Steven F. Kruger, 'Medieval Christian (Dis)identifications: Muslims and Jews in Guibert of Nogent', (Paper presented at Georgetown University, 'Cultural Frictions: Medieval Studies in Postmodern Contexts' Conference, 17 November 1998), <http://www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/conf/cs95/papers/kruger.html> [accessed 02.07.2006]. Kruger cites Guibert: cf. Guibert of Nogent, *The Autobiography of Guibert, Abbot of Nogent-Sous-Coucy*, trans. by C. C. Swinton Bland (London: Routledge, 1925), pp. 202-5. Cf. also Stow, *Alienated Minority*, pp. 37-8.

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Hirsch Graetz, *History of the Jews, from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, ed. and part. trans. by Bella Löwy, 5 vols (London: Nutt, 1891-1892) III, p. 358.

opposed by churchmen like Peter and by secular rulers, this perceived threat was acted upon by bands of crusaders, and Jews were killed or forcibly converted.<sup>43</sup>

Oddly enough, Jewish conversion itself was another potential source of anxieties over pollution, since it was sometimes believed that new converts to Christianity were covertly maintaining Jewish religious practices and identity.<sup>44</sup> Worries were exacerbated by the fact that, despite the condemnation of Pope Gregory and his successors, force was at times used as a means of securing conversion. This could be associated with such phenomena as the popular preaching and social disruption that accompanied the Crusades.<sup>45</sup> In Spain, following massacres of Jews in 1391, many *conversos* or new converts were created.<sup>46</sup> However, this was not sufficient to neutralise the problem of potential unbelief. According to Cecil Roth, doubts as to the efficacy of conversions meant that a new threat to Christian hegemony had come into being at the same time:

Previous to [1391], there had been a considerable body of unbelievers outside the Church, easily recognizable, and rendered theologically innocuous by a systematic series of governmental and clerical regulations. Now, there was a similarly large body inside the fold, insidiously working its way into every limb of the body politic and ecclesiastic, openly contemning in many cases the doctrines of the Church and contaminating by its influence the whole mass of the faithful.<sup>47</sup>

Norman Roth, in contrast, takes the view that in medieval Spain ‘Jews converted of their own free will, for a variety of reasons’, and that *conversos* were accepted by all but a ‘powerful minority’ of ‘old Christians’.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, inquisition records make it clear that Jewish converts, whether willing or not, were at times accused of

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 304-17 and 355-66. For contemporary accounts of a threat to Jews from a crusader in 1096 and the anti-Jewish violence at Mainz in 1187, cf. Robert Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages* (New York: Behrman, 1980), pp. 113-4 and 117-122.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos* (New York: Meridian, 1959); cf. for example pp. 2-3 and 31-2. For an account of the difficulties of integrating Jewish converts into Christian society, cf. Robert C. Stacey, ‘The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England’, *Speculum*, 67 (1992), 263-283.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. for example Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>46</sup> Roth, pp. 15-20.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p. xix.

returning to the practices of their original religion.<sup>49</sup> Since Christians themselves often recognised forced conversions to be invalid, problems arose surrounding the status of Jews who claimed to have converted unwillingly.<sup>50</sup>

The historical problems for medieval Christianity surrounding Jewish conversion have a particular bearing upon miracle tales featuring Jews who convert after a miraculous event. In legendary narratives, conversion was represented as being an unambiguously positive resolution to the problem of Jewish unbelief; in some tales, such as Jacobus' 'Finding of the Holy Cross', the converted Jew went on to become an ecclesiastical figure, underscoring the efficacy of the process. In reality, as we have seen, conversion could never be an entirely effective way of dealing with Jewish communities. This may have been one of the factors that eventually led European leaders to the drastic measure of Jewish expulsion in the late middle ages.<sup>51</sup> Before that time, however, although Jews were seen as posing a potential threat to the Christian communities within which they lived, Augustine's support for limited tolerance in the service of Christian hegemony remained the ideal. Augustine provided a model from which, in the following centuries, churchmen, popes and legislators could formulate positions towards Jews. Gregory the Great (Pope Gregory I, c.540-604) originated the formula '*sicut Iudaeis*', which was to be re-used by Calixtus II in 1120 and subsequently throughout the high medieval period: 'Just as the Jews should not [*sicut Iudaeis non...*] have licence in

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. *The Jews in Western Europe 1400-1600*, trans. and ed. by John Edwards (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), for English translations of the trial of Gonzalo Pérez Jarada, accused of performing or commissioning Jewish prayers, participating in Jewish ceremonies, eating kosher meat and reverencing the scroll of the Law, pp. 39-43, and of the inquisitor's manual of Nicolau Eymerich, on Jewish converts returning to Judaism and being liable to be burnt as heretics, pp. 32-3.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Jacques Fournier, 'Confessio Barud [Baruch] Olim Iudei Modo Baptizati et Postmodum Reversi ad Iudaismum', in *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318-1325)*, ed. by Jean Duvernoy (Toulouse: Privat, 1965), I, pp. 177-90, in which the Jew Baruch, in front of the Inquisition, cites the experience of forced conversion as a justification for remaining a Jew. The original MS is from the Vatican Library, Lat. MS. 4030. An English translation of Baruch's trial exists online: 'Confession of Baruch, Once a Jew, then Baptized and Now Returned to Judaism', in *The Inquisition Record of Jacques Fournier, Bishop of Pamiers 1318-1325: an English translation by Nancy P. Stork of selected confessions by Cathar heretics and Jews to Bishop Jacques Fournier and the inquisition at Pamiers (France)*, trans. by Nancy P. Stork, San Jose State University, 1996, <http://www2.sjsu.edu/depts/english/Fournier/Baruch.htm> [accessed 28.06.2006].

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Stow on the Spanish expulsion: 'In the words of the decree of expulsion, Ferdinand and Isabella were now persuaded that the Jews were causing irremediable "damage to the realm" because they were contaminating the purity of the *conversos*' faith.' *Alienated Minority*, p. 299.



their synagogues to arrogate anything beyond that permitted by law, so too in those things granted them they should experience no infringements of their rights.’ (*sicut Iudaeis non debet esse licentia quicquam in synagogis suis ultra quam permissum est lege praesumere, ita in his quae eis concessa sunt nullum debent praeiudicium sustinere*).<sup>52</sup> As Pope, he listened to and protected Jews: ‘responding to the complaints of Jews, Gregory intervened on at least six occasions to prevent violence against Jews, their synagogues, and their religious practices.’<sup>53</sup>

Yet, as theologian, Gregory reiterated the polemical argument expressed by predecessors like Paul, Tertullian and Augustine. In his *Moralitas* on the Book of Job, he states that the Jewish race is the ‘elder son’ of God, but the Jews adhered only to the letter of the law, and lost understanding of the law through their blind rejection of Christ, believing him to be human only. They cruelly persecuted, mocked and killed Christ, and as a result their temple was destroyed by Rome through God’s will, and they became a subject people. Being perverted by Satan, they continue blind, foolish, proud, hard, stubborn and perfidious. They are earthly and carnal, and so the light of preaching has been transferred to the Gentiles, who have more faith and have substituted for the Jews in God’s plan. However, the Jews have, albeit unwillingly, fulfilled God’s purpose in being the cause of redemption. The church suffers from their absence and will rejoice when they convert at the end of time.<sup>54</sup> Gregory’s remarks are salient ones, summarizing the principal contradictions of ongoing medieval Christian attitudes towards Jews. In the *Legenda Aurea* tales, we will find literary examples of the same attitudes: Jews treated as the ‘elder son’ with a unique connection to Christian origins, for example, along with

<sup>52</sup> Gregory I, Pope, *S. Gregorii Magni Opera: Registrum Epistularum* 8-14, CCSL 140A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), Reg.8.25, pp. 546-7; English, Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 76.

<sup>53</sup> *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 75.

<sup>54</sup> Gregory I, Pope, *Morals on the Book of Job*, A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church 18, 21, 23 and 31, 3 vols in 4 (Oxford: Parker, 1844-50). Specific references from Volume I include: Jews as ‘elder son’ of God, 2.48, p. 499; Jews lose understanding of the law through rejection of Christ, pp. 104, 498; Cruelty of Jews, 6.34, p. 338; Jewish temple destroyed by Rome and Jews brought into subjection, 9.6, p. 498; Satan corrupts persecutors of Christ, 2.48, p. 99; Jewish blindness, 4.21, p. 199, 6.34, p. 338; foolishness, 6.3-4 and subsequent, pp. 314ff.; pride, 6.5-6, p. 315; stubbornness, 9.6, p. 498; the light of preaching removed from Jews, 9.8, p. 499; Jews cause of redemption, 6.32-3, pp. 336-7. References from Volume III include: Jews lose ‘mysteries of the world’, being earthly, compared to clay, 29.6, p. 307; Jews are legalistic, pp. 307, 362. Latin edition: Gregory I, Pope, *Moralia in Job*, PL 75, (Paris: Migne, 1862), cols 499-1162.



examples of Jews re-enacting the persecution and killing of Christ. Above all, Jews in the tales are ultimately seen to further a Christian process of redemption.

Gregory's theological stance regarding the Jews makes it clear that his protection of them, admirable in humanitarian terms, does not constitute any recognition of Jews as equals, but constructs them, as his predecessors did, as drawing their value from their original role as recipients of the law, and their eschatological role, yet to reach fulfilment. He justifies his protection of Jews by citing abstract principles, chief amongst which are justice and the tradition of sanction for Jews in Roman law:

We forbid that these said Hebrews be oppressed or afflicted in unreasonable fashion; but, just as they are permitted by Roman law to live, so may they maintain their observances as they have learnt them without any hindrance, as justice would dictate.' (*Praedictos uero Hebraeos grauari uel affligi contra rationis ordinem prohibemus. Sed sicut Romanis uiuere legibus permittuntur, annuente iustitia actosque suos ut norunt, nullo impediante [disponente] disponant.*)<sup>55</sup>

This follows the Theodosian Code of 438, which said that Jewish legal rights were to be preserved if Jews respected Christian rights.<sup>56</sup>

It should, however, be pointed out that Roman law of the Christian era often curbed the rights of Jews even as it granted them protection. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, for example, sees Christianity as having internalised Hellenistic 'contempt' for Judaism as being 'non-Greek' and thus 'uncivilised', and as attempting to distance itself from Judaism.<sup>57</sup> Robert Wilken cites populist views in Alexandria in the first centuries CE, as revealed in the *Acta Alexandrinorum* (Acts of the Pagan Martyrs):

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<sup>55</sup> Gregory I, Pope, *S. Gregorii Magni Opera: Registrum Epistularum* 1-7, CCSL 140 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), Reg. 2.45, p. 137. English: Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 75. Also cf. Cohen, p. 74; R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 77; and G. R. Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), p. 136.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Stow, *Alienated Minority*, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew: Twenty Centuries of Christian Anti-Semitism* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. xiv-v.

The word 'Jew' is used as a term of opprobrium. In one scene, a citizen of Alexandria accuses the Roman emperor of having Jews in his 'privy council', knowing that the term Jew would be 'offensive'.<sup>58</sup>

After the revolt of 132-5 C.E., the Roman emperor Hadrian imposed restrictions on circumcision and expelled the Jews from Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup> Constantine (324-7) 'both protected and restricted the Jews', giving Jews equal privileges with pagans and Christians, but later re-enacting Hadrian's edict exiling them from Jerusalem. Constantius II (337-61) 'continued restriction on the Jews, prohibiting their worship, burdening them with taxes, and punishing all Christians who joined the communities of the Jews'.<sup>60</sup> Thus, in following Roman tradition, Gregory was continuing a policy of partial restriction towards Jews, not one which granted them equal status. Gregory also cites the principle, which he seems to apply as a general rule, not pertaining only to Jewish conversion, that the Church should convert outsiders by persuasion rather than force.<sup>61</sup> The tension between the protection of Jews as a matter of law, as a preferred ecclesiastical practice or even as a humanitarian principle, on the one hand, and a distaste for Jews and a desire to curb their activities on theological grounds on the other, was to be a salient factor in many official pronouncements concerning Jews over the centuries. Calixtus II reiterated the *Sicut Judaeis* formula in a bull of 1120, as did Pope Innocent III in his *Constitution for the Jews* (1199): King Venceslas II, in his charter for the Jews of Moravia, c.1283, made an appeal 'to respect the Jews' humanity, and not their unbelief.'<sup>62</sup>

This formulation is a telling one. It outlines a fundamental ambiguity in the Church's position on the Jews, whose humanity can be respected but whose beliefs cannot. A salient factor is that the charter assumes that unbelievers share a common humanity with adherents of the Christian faith. This assumption, which seems obvious by modern standards, was in fact questioned in the middle ages. Attempts by

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<sup>58</sup> Acta Hermaisci; Musurillo, H., *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs: Acta Alexandrinorum* (Oxford, 1954), p. 45, cited in Wilken, p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> Wilken, p. 43.

<sup>60</sup> Harkins, introduction to *Saint John Chrysostom: Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, pp. xxviii-xxix.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 76.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Guido Kisch, *The Jews in Medieval Germany: A Study of their Legal and Social Status* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 325.

churchmen and theologians to ponder what role Jews played in a Christian universe led to the very humanity of Jews coming into question.

As an early example, in the fourth century, Chrysostom, whose intolerance of Judaising we have already discussed, produced anti-Jewish sermons notable for their rhetorical vehemence and their use of invective. He categorised Jews as, among much else, dogs, drunkards, beasts and harbourers of demons.<sup>63</sup> In his book on Chrysostom, Wilken has argued that Chrysostom's representations of Jews comprise standard topoi of invective rhetoric<sup>64</sup> and, by implication, that they do not constitute a truly anti-Judaic portrayal. But Chrysostom's rhetoric targets Jews very specifically, and the imagery he chooses has its roots in religious discourse. When he calls Jews 'beasts' he cites the words of prophets who called Israel 'as obstinate as a stubborn heifer'<sup>65</sup> and 'an untamed calf'.<sup>66</sup> Chrysostom interprets these sayings to mean that Jews resemble disobedient beasts in the stubbornness they evince when they fail 'to accept the yoke of Christ' and 'pull the plow of his teaching'.<sup>67</sup> This analogy in itself is not evidence that Chrysostom thought of Jews as subhuman: likening Jews to disobedient cattle who reject the 'yoke' of Christ's law is a conceit used to differentiate Jews from the obedient cattle, that is, Christians. Nonetheless, when Chrysostom refers to the Jews as 'brute animals', and says that '[a]lthough such beasts are unfit for work, they are fit for killing',<sup>68</sup> he creates a vivid metaphor of a bestial and inhuman Jew. When he says that the Jews' gluttony '[gives] birth to [their] ungodliness',<sup>69</sup> he is concretising the idea that Jews had only a literal or carnal understanding, as opposed to a spiritual one. In later centuries, this idea would be developed towards a formulation that Jews lacked the higher reason that makes people truly human.

<sup>63</sup> Some instances of this rhetoric from Chrysostom's *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*: Jews called dogs: 1.2.1-2, pp. 5-6; Jews called drunkards: 1.2.5, p. 8; Jews called beasts: 1.2.5-6, p. 8, 1.6.8, p. 25; Jews called or associated with demons: 1.6.2, p. 2, and 6-7, p. 24, 1.7.5-11, pp. 28-31.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, 4, 'Fourth-Century Preaching and the Rhetoric of Abuse', esp. pp. 116-123.

<sup>65</sup> *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, 1.2.5, p. 8; cf. Hosea 4. 16-17.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. Jeremiah 2. 18.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.2.5-6, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.2.6, pp. 8-9.

The application of *ratio* to matters of faith was to become the great task of the twelfth-century scholastics.<sup>70</sup> Abelard's '*Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian*' engages with the question of *ratio* in the context of interfaith dispute. In the *Dialogue*, the Philosopher demands of the Christian and the Jew, 'did some rational consideration induce you into your respective religious schools of thought, or do you here simply follow the opinion of men and the love of your own people?'<sup>71</sup> He goes on to say that people raised in a faith may proclaim their belief without understanding what it is they believe, 'as if faith consists in the utterance of words rather than in the understanding of the mind.'<sup>72</sup> Yet the Christian later refutes the purely rationalistic and sociological arguments of the Philosopher, arguing that faith and reason arrive at the same conclusions:

[A]ccording to our faith and clear reason, wherever a faithful soul may be, it finds God since he is present everywhere [...]<sup>73</sup>

By this standard, the Jew, along with the Philosopher, is lacking in both faith and rational understanding; the Christian explains to the Philosopher that

if you knew how to read Scripture in a prophetic spirit rather than in the manner of the Jews, and if you knew how to understand what is said of God under corporeal forms, not literally and in a material sense but mystically through allegory, you would not accept what is said as an unlettered person does.<sup>74</sup>

Here Abelard reiterates the old accusation that Jews cannot appreciate the allegorical sense. But, in keeping with the concerns of his age, he seems to group prophecy and faith, or 'mystical' and allegorical understanding, with a rational, educated approach, as opposed to the 'unlettered' acceptance of literal (Jewish) interpretations.

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 34-47 and 77-93.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Abelard, *A Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian*, trans. by Pierre Payer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979) p. 24.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

This kind of argument led some theologians to a further conclusion. If Jews remained unable to use, or were unconvinced by, this higher rational argument, and if reason was what distinguished humanity from animals, the response of some thinkers was to class Jews as belonging to the order of beasts. Yet the Scholastic view that Jews lacked the highest form of reason did not constitute an altogether new or radical perspective. Rather, it was an attempt to integrate traditional ideas about Jews with the new preoccupation with *ratio*. Scholastic thinkers were creating a rational explanation as to why Jews could not be considered to be rational beings. In doing so, they were dealing with the presence of unconverted Jews in Christendom in a new way, not by justifying it eschatologically, as Paul and Augustine had, but by explaining it empirically.<sup>75</sup>

Peter the Venerable's *Adversus Iudeos* is an example of this methodology, as Anna Sapir Abulafia notes:

[Peter] likens Jews to animals because they refuse to accept a Christological reading of the Old Testament, however often and however clearly it is explained to them. [...] Peter wonders aloud whether he is confronting a human opponent or an animal. '[...] I know not whether a Jew is a man because he does not cede to human reason.' (*'Nescio plane utrum Iudeus homo sit, qui [non] rationi humanae caedit.'*)<sup>76</sup>

Peter is quite clear that Jews, if deficient in reason, should be classed with the animals:

Lest I lie, I dare not profess that you [a Jew] are human, because I understand that the rational faculty which distinguishes the human being from other animals and beasts and renders him superior to them has been obliterated or suppressed in you [...]. Why are you not called a brute animal, why not a beast? (*Hominem enim te profiteri ne forte mentiar, non audeo, quia in te extinctam, immo sepultam quae hominem a caeteris animalibus vel bestiis separat eisque praeferat rationem agnosco [...]. Cur enim non dicaris animal brutum, cur non bestia?*)<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, pp. 34-47 and pp. 77-136.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 116; Latin quotation, Peter the Venerable, *Petri Venerabilis Adversus Iudeorum Inveteratam Duritiem*, ed. by Yvonne Friedman, CCCM 58 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), 3, ll. 562-6, pp. 57-8.

<sup>77</sup> English, Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 259; Latin, *Adversus Iudeorum*, 5, ll. 6-8, p. 125.

Similarly, Bernard of Clairvaux, early exemplar of the affective movement which, with its graphic crucifixion imagery and emotional and sensual appeal, was to play a part in late-medieval popular anti-Jewish attitudes, uses the comparison of Jews to cattle when discussing Jewish lack of rational capabilities. Like Peter, Bernard connects his imagery with the idea of the imperfect knowledge possessed by the Jew:

O intelligence, coarse, dense, and, as it were, bovine, which did not recognise God even in his own works!

Perhaps the Jew will complain, as of a deep injury, that I call his intelligence bovine. But let him read what is said by the prophet Isaiah, and he will find that it is even less than bovine. For he says: *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider* (Is.i.3)

*(O nihilominus intellectum grossum et certe bovinum, qui Deum non intellexerunt nec in operibus Dei!*

*Nimum me fortasse queratur in sui suggillatione Judaeus, qui intellectum illius dico bovinum. Sed legat in Isaia, et plus quam bovinum audiet. Cognovit, inquit, bos possessorem suum, et asinus praespe domini sui: Israel non cognovit me; populus meus non intellexit (Isai I, 3)).*<sup>78</sup>

Although Bernard is using exegetic techniques, rather than those of rational inquiry, he characterises intelligence as that which enables one to recognise God, and whose absence puts a human being on a level with, or below, that of a beast.<sup>79</sup>

Thomas Aquinas was the expositor *par excellence* of the rational method, attempting to bring Aristotelian ontological and epistemological arguments into harmony with Christian doctrine and belief, and with Patristic writers, especially Augustine. His legal taxonomies follow on from twelfth-century attempts, including that of Abelard, to make pagan ideas of 'natural law' fit the pattern of salvation history, whereby the *lex vetus* is superseded by the *lex evangelium*.<sup>80</sup> John Hood sees a contradiction in Aquinas's characterisation of the Old Law, which on the one hand argues that the law inculcated morals and prepared the Jews to receive the messiah, and on the other (following Paul) that the Law was imperfect and in fact contributed

<sup>78</sup> Sermon 60.4-5, Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Cantica Canticorum: Eighty Six Sermons on the Song of Solomon', in *Life and Works of Saint Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux*, ed. by Dom John Mabillon, trans. by Samuel J. Eales, 4 vols (London: Hodges, 1889-96), IV (1896), p. 362; Latin, *Sermones in Cantica Cantorum*, PL 183 (Paris: Migne, 1879), cols 779D-1194D (cols 1067D-1068A).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Cohen's discussion, *Living Letters of the Law*, pp. 225-231.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. John Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), pp. 268-72.



to sin, and that the Jews had degenerated steadily from the time of Moses to the Christian era.<sup>81</sup> As Hood notes, however, Aquinas's division of the Old Law into moral, judicial and ceremonial forms means that the Old Law need not always be spoken of as a unified whole.<sup>82</sup> Part of it may be in accord with the new dispensation: 'because they are in fact natural law principles, the *moralia*, and in particular the Ten Commandments, were not abrogated by Christ [...]. [Aquinas] identified natural law with rational morality, the knowledge of right and wrong attainable by the human mind.'<sup>83</sup>

Aquinas's exposition of the Old Law may be significant with regard to the question of whether postbiblical Jews can be said to possess reason. If, as he thought, unlike the *iudicialia* and the *caeremonialia* (at least in their literal, outward forms),<sup>84</sup> the *moralia* retained their force under the New Law, it would seem that the *moralia* at least, embodying 'rational morality' in Hood's terms, were shared by Jews and Christians at the time of Christ and perhaps after. Yet Aquinas notes that law took on a new dimension at the advent of Christ:

The New Law consists chiefly in the grace of the Holy Ghost [...] men became receivers of this grace through God's Son made man [...] grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. ([...] *principalitas legis novae est gratia Spiritus Sancti...Hanc autem gratiam consequuntur homines per Dei Filium hominem factum...gratia et veritas per Iesum Christum facta est.*)<sup>85</sup>

It remains to be determined whether for Aquinas, as for Abelard, 'grace and truth', that is, a specifically Christian prophetic and mystical understanding that the Jews cannot possess, is associated with rationality.

In the 'Treatise on Grace' from the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas distinguishes between the 'intelligible truths (*intelligibilia*) we can come to know through sensible

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<sup>81</sup> *Aquinas and the Jews*, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 45-61.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 51-3.

<sup>85</sup> English, *Summa Theologiae* II (1<sup>st</sup> part), Q.108, Art. I, in Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings of St Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by Anton C. Pegis, 2 vols (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), II, p. 968; Latin, *S. Thomae de Aquino Ordinis Praedicatorum Summa Theologiae*, Instituti Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis, 5 vols (Ottawa: Studii Generalis O. Pr., 1941-5), II, ST I-II, Q.108, Art. I, col. 1344b.

things (*per sensibilia*)’ for which ordinary human understanding, albeit ultimately created and moved by God, is sufficient, and the ‘higher intelligible truths’ which

the human intellect cannot know, unless it be perfected by a stronger light, viz., the light of faith, or of prophecy, which is called the light of grace [...] (*Altiora vero intelligibilia intellectus humanus cognoscere non potest nisi fortiori lumine perficiatur, sicut lumine fidei vel prophetiae; quod dicitur lumen gratiae...*)<sup>86</sup>

Although divine help is always necessary for knowledge of truth, this ‘new illumination’ of grace is only needed for things that ‘surpass [man’s] natural knowledge’:

Every truth [...] is from the Holy Ghost as bestowing the natural light, and moving us to understand and to speak the truth; but not as dwelling in us by sanctifying grace, or as bestowing any habitual gift superadded to nature. For this takes place only with regard to knowing and speaking certain truths, and especially in regard to such as pertain to faith [...] (*omne verum [...] est a Spiritu Sancto sicut ab infundente naturale lumen, et movente ad intelligendum et loquendum veritatem. Non autem sicut ab inhabitante per gratiam gratum facientem, vel sicut largiente aliquod habituale donum naturae superadditum; sed hoc solum est in quibusdam veris cognoscendis et loquendis, et maxime in illis quae pertinent ad fidem [...]*)<sup>87</sup>

Although the Jews may share in the ‘natural light’ which enables humanity to apprehend ordinary truth, they must be barred from knowing and speaking the ‘higher intelligible truths’ made accessible by the ‘light of grace’ which ‘came by Jesus Christ’. Aquinas’s formulation does not necessarily imply that Jews possess no reason at all, but it does imply that the highest form of reason is reserved for Christians. This idea is particularly relevant to miracle tales in which Jews are depicted in disputations with Christians on matters of faith (discussed in Chapter Five). In such tales, Jews confront Christians in reasoned debate, yet the Christian victory is typically gained by means of a miracle. Thus, in the tales, faith and the revelation of grace through miracle, seen in Aquinas to equal the pinnacle of human

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., Q.109, Art. I, pp. 980-1; Latin, *ibid.*, Q. 109, Art. I, col. 1352b.

<sup>87</sup> English, *ibid.*, p. 981; Latin, *ibid.*

reason, is shown to defeat mere rhetoric, and in particular Jewish literal argument and biblical interpretation.

Miracle tales involving disputations form a subset of the medieval genre of disputation literature involving Christians and Jews. Beginning with Justin, who wrote the *Dialogue with Trypho*, written as an argument between Justin himself and the Jew Trypho and his friends, early and medieval Christian writers chose the disputation format as a lively way to present Christian apologetics.<sup>88</sup> It is difficult to know to what extent these works record real arguments between Jews and Christians, and to what extent they are simply apologetics dressed up in dialogue form, but they provide a space for subversive questioning and the containment of such questioning, whether by appeals to scriptural detail, to reason, or to revelation and faith. The increasing high-medieval preoccupation with rational enquiry led to fresh examination of doctrine, like transubstantiation, to which rational doubt could be applied. Yet when apologetics were attempted using rational proofs rather than scriptural exegesis, they also inevitably brought up the issue of rational doubt about doctrine, and about miraculous events such as the Virgin Birth; the events of Christ's life and death, stripped of their spiritual significance, could easily become the location for disbelief and even disgust.

In order to address these issues, disputation literature had to raise issues of doubt and disgust in order to quell them, a potentially dangerous approach. Gilbert Crispin's (c.1045-1117) 'A Discussion of a Jew with a Christian Concerning the Christian Faith',<sup>89</sup> dedicated to Anselm of Canterbury, was, according to Gilbert, based on actual arguments put forth by a Jew with whom he had conversed. In the 'Discussion', the Jew is given a lively critical voice; when Gilbert quotes Psalm 96.7,<sup>90</sup> 'Let them be all confounded that adore graven things, and that glory in their idols', the Jew replies, 'Let the Christians be confounded also, for the Christians too

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<sup>88</sup> For an early example, cf. Justin Martyr, 'Dialogue with Trypho'. Another early example, in A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae Until the Renaissance* (Cambridge: CUP, 1935), is the discussion of 'Grgentius and Herban' (pp. 140-50), discussed in Chapter Five. For twelfth-century polemics, cf. for example Pseudo-William of Champeaux, *Dialogus inter Christianum et Iudeum de Fide Catholica*, PL 163 (Paris: Migne 1854), cols 1045-72, and the dialogues of Gilbert Crispin and Odo of Cambrai, discussed below.

<sup>89</sup> Gilbert Crispin, *Disputatio Judaei cum Christiano de Fide Christiana*, PL 159 (Paris: Migne, 1865), cols 1005-1036.

<sup>90</sup> Psalm 97 in later versions.

worship statues and glory in their images; for you sometimes make images of the wretched God himself, hanging from the gallows, nailed to the cross - something horrid even to look at - and worship it'.<sup>91</sup> Of course, especially in Byzantium, where the iconoclasm controversy had raged in the seventh and eighth centuries,<sup>92</sup> but also in the west,<sup>93</sup> not Jews but Christians had been opposed to what they saw as Christian worship of images. Thus it would appear that, given the known scepticism of the Jews regarding Christian doctrine,<sup>94</sup> Jewish characters may have provided a relatively safe mouthpiece for doubts that, voiced by Christians, could threaten the ideological wholeness of the Corpus Christi.<sup>95</sup>

The dangers of raising doubt could be contained within the text by skilful argument: Odo of Cambrai, for example, in his *Disputatio contra Judaeum Leonem nomine de adventu Christi*, following Peter Damian, Anselm of Canterbury and Guibert of Nogent, uses the metaphor of light, which can pass through objects without harming them or, in Odo's example, is itself not dirtied by shining upon filth. However, as with Gilbert's dialogue, in order to arrive at this vivid image of purity and light the text must voice the objection of the Jew 'that God was enclosed in the obscene prison of the disgusting belly of his mother for nine months only to come out from her shameful exit'. (*[Dicitis enim] Deum, in maternis visceribus ob[s]ceno carcere fetidi ventris clausum, novem mensibus pati, et tandem pudendo exitu [...] progredi [...]'*).<sup>96</sup> Given such examples, it was essential for scholastic writers to contain doubt on 'rational' grounds, whether voiced by Jews or Christians, and to point out the necessity for reason to work hand-in-hand with faith.

<sup>91</sup> *Disputatio Judaei cum Christiano*, col. 1034A.; English translation by Michael L. Kay. Cf. also Williams, p. 379.

<sup>92</sup> For an overview of the Iconoclastic controversy, including pagan and Jewish attitudes towards iconoclasm, cf. L. W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

<sup>93</sup> For example, on St Bernard's 'iconoclasm' (preferring linguistic and interior richness of imagination and imagery to physical ornament and images), cf. Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 84-7.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. for example Rubin's *Gentile Tales*, section entitled 'Interjection: What did Jews Think of the Eucharist? According to Jews and According to Christians', pp. 93-103.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Abulafia: 'The basic challenge Jews presented to the literati [of twelfth century Europe] was the fact that many of their criticisms of Christianity were uncomfortably similar to the growing number of questions which began to be asked by enquiring minds within the church.' *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, p. 135.

A somewhat more subtle accusation than that of Jews' lack of reason became important to clergy and lawgivers in the thirteenth century. This concerned Talmudic Judaism, which was thought to constitute a divergence from the strict adherence to the Law and the Prophets as set down in scripture. The existence of the Talmud, containing new interpretations and commentaries, has been said to have constituted in medieval Christian eyes a kind of Jewish heresy.<sup>97</sup> When in 1236 a Christian convert from Judaism called Nicholas Donin presented a list of accusations against the Talmud and rabbinic Judaism to Gregory IX, it eventually sparked a trial of the Talmud in a clerical court, and a subsequent book-burning: ten to twelve thousand volumes of the Talmud were burned – within the space of two days – in Paris in 1242.<sup>98</sup> The Talmud was said to contain various blasphemies against Christ and Christians; perhaps more significantly, it represented a growth and development of Judaism that, as in the laws prohibiting the building or repair of synagogues, Christian leaders had long attempted to curb. As Cohen says,

Not only was the Talmud heretical with respect to biblical Judaism, and blasphemous against Christianity, but the presence of talmudic Judaism in Christian society threatened 'injury to the Christian Faith'. The Church had to assume the responsibility to obliterate it.<sup>99</sup>

In response to this issue, interfaith disputations took place, notably those between Donin and Rabbi Yehiel ben Joseph in Paris in 1240<sup>100</sup>, and between Pablo Christiani, another *converso*, and Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides) in Barcelona in 1263.<sup>101</sup> The Christian disputants tried to show that not only the Torah and the prophets but also the Talmud proved that the messiah had come. In Chapter Five, miracle tales involving disputations between Christians and Jews will be

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<sup>96</sup> Odo of Cambrai, *Disputatio contra Judaeum Leonem nomine de adventu Christi, Filii Dei*, PL 160 (Paris: Migne, 1880), cols 1103-12 (col. 1110), cited in Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, pp. 83-4. Cf. also Abulafia, pp. 108-9.

<sup>97</sup> 'Talmudic Judaism did not hold true to the biblical faith and observance the toleration of which Augustine had repeatedly preached; by implication, the Talmudic Jew did not serve the purpose that justified the Jewish presence in Christendom.' Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 325.

<sup>98</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: the Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 60-62.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 68. Cohen cites the legatine commission of bishop Eudes in 1247.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-6, 69-73.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 108-128.

compared with the actual disputations that took place in the century when Jacobus' work was compiled.

The connection between the Talmud and Christian suspicions that Jews were deviating from their role as obsolete followers of Mosaic law may point to a development in medieval Christian attitudes towards Jews and Judaism. Thomas Aquinas's 'taxonomy of infidelity',<sup>102</sup> measuring the unbelief of the Jew against that of the pagan and the heretic, provides an example of how, in a Crusading age, Christians were seeing Judaism as one of a spectrum of alternatives to Christianity that included Islam and Christian heresy,<sup>103</sup> seeking to rate each according to the dangers it presented, and formulating the appropriate defences against each one. In many cases, these defences came to include violent measures.

Historians have put forth various reasons for the rise in violence against Jewish communities in the high and late middle ages. John Edwards, for example, cites issues such as the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which restricted contact between Christians and Jews, the adoption of the 'Jew badge', further separating the communities, the discovery of the Talmud and anti-Jewish preaching of the friars,<sup>104</sup> millennial anxieties and the rise of accusations of Jewish hostility towards Christians, prompted for example by the fourteenth-century outbreaks of plague, which Jews were accused of spreading.<sup>105</sup> Jewish involvement in finance and lending at interest could be a source of profit for secular governments, and even partially supported by the Church, but led to tensions stemming from the Christian prohibition against usury.<sup>106</sup> The Crusades against the Arab world began in 1096 and continued through the twelfth century; an anti-heretical Crusade begun by Innocent III massacred Albigensian heretics in the thirteenth century in France; and, with the beginning of the Crusades, pogroms by Crusading groups against European Jewish communities began, with the Jewish communities destroyed in 1096 in Mainz, Worms, and Cologne, and attacked in many other, mostly German, cities.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 369.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 157-66, and cf. pp. 217, 219, 231 and 245ff.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. also Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: the Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*.

<sup>105</sup> Edwards, *The Jews in Christian Europe 1400-1700*, pp. 11-40.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Stow, pp. 210-230.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. for example Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, and Stow, pp. 102-120.



One spur towards violence may have been a growing perception of Jews as the original killers of Christ: in addition to the charge of unbelief, which was common to Muslims, Jews and heretics, Jews faced the charge of deicide. Abelard, following Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury and others, had affirmed that the killers of Christ had acted in ignorance, and that ignorance was not a sin; since the persecutors of Christ had thought that they were acting for God's sake, they could not be in contempt of God; it would have been a worse sin to spare Christ and the apostles against the dictates of their consciences.<sup>108</sup> Aquinas, however, developed the idea that the Jewish elders who killed Christ possessed *ignorantia affectata*, a willed ignorance:

They were ignorant of the mystery of his divinity [...] Even so, one must understand that their ignorance did not excuse them from their crime, since it was, in a sense, voluntary ignorance. For they beheld the blatant signs of his divinity, but they corrupted them out of hatred and jealousy of Christ; and they wished not to believe his words, by which he proclaimed himself to be the son of God. (*Mysterium autem divinitatis eius ignorabant [...] Sciendum tamen quod eorum ignorantia non eos excusabat a crimine, quia erat quodammodo ignorantia affectata. Videbant enim evidētia signa divinitatis ipsius; sed ex odio et invidia Christi ea pervertebant, et verbis eius, quibus se Dei Filium fatebatur, credere noluerunt.*)<sup>109</sup>

This formulation was one way of dealing with a basic contradiction between the image of Jews as blind, implying that they simply lacked spiritual understanding, and the image of Jews as obstinate, implying a recognition, but also a wilful denial, of truth. During the Crusading period, the view of Jews as culpable was implicated in the Christian attacks on Jewish communities described above; members of the 'People's Crusade' enacted their violence against Jews 'because Jews had killed their Christ and were Christ's worst enemies'.<sup>110</sup>

The earliest association of Jews with blood-guilt and hostility had been rooted in theology. Early representations of Jews as bestial, demonic or carnal were largely related to a connection with the supposed inability of Jews to understand the spiritual

<sup>108</sup> Peter Abelard, *Peter Abelard's Ethics*, (Latin and English), ed. and trans. by D. E. Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), pp. 54-7 and 66-7; Cf. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, pp. 287-8.

<sup>109</sup> English, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 373; Latin, *ST III* (Vol. IV), Q. 47, Art. 5, cols 2732a-b.

sense of their own religion, and their resistance to Christianity. Even Chrysostom's vivid anti-Jewish metaphors were used in a theological context: when he speaks of the synagogue as 'a dwelling of demons', this is a graphic way of illustrating his contention that Jews 'fail to know the Father [...] crucified the Son [...] thrust off the help of the Spirit.'<sup>110</sup> Similarly, his categorisation of Jews as 'dogs' or 'gluttons' referred to the Jews' non-acceptance of Christianity or misinterpretation of scripture.<sup>112</sup> Yet these early constructions of the hermeneutic Jew can be seen to have some links to the populist blood-libel beliefs and representations which were to arise in the course of the following centuries. These later representations went far beyond anything Chrysostom had said about the Jews. Myths arose based upon supposed physical characteristics of the Jew, such as male menstruation, horns or an unpleasant odour.<sup>113</sup> In the high to late medieval period, blood-libel narratives which described violence of Jews towards Christians, often in terms that suggested the Crucifixion, and sometimes retributive violence of Christians towards Jews, became increasingly common. A well-known example is Chaucer's 'Prioress's Tale', a narrative of Jewish child-murder that had many variants. The theme of Jewish hostility and unbelief might appear in tales from collections like the *Legenda*, in plays like the Croxton 'Play of the Sacrament' or the mystery cycles, in poetry, like the 'Prioress' Tale', and also as visual and architectural motifs, like Ecclesia and Synagoga and the Judensau.<sup>114</sup> The *Legenda Aurea* and other sources relate tales of

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<sup>110</sup> Gavin I. Langmuir, *History, Religion and Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 290.

<sup>111</sup> Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, 1.3.3, p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 1.2.1-2, pp. 5-6, and 1.2.6, pp. 8-9.

<sup>113</sup> On Jewish male menstruation or bleeding (associated with blood-guilt concerning Christ, to cure which, in some legends, Jews were supposed to require Christian blood), cf. Irvén M. Resnick, 'Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses', *Harvard Theological Review*, 93.3 (2000), 241-63; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, pp. 148-9, and Caesarius' *Dialogue on Miracles*, I, 23, p. 102, for a story which takes place on or around Good Friday, 'for then the Jews are said to labour under a sickness called the bloody flux [...] On horned Jews, cf. Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). On the *foetor Judaicus*, cf. Trachtenberg, p. 116, and Caesarius, I, 25, p. 107, for a story in which a baptised Jewish girl smells 'a very evil odour [...] as of Jews,' which turns out to emanate from her parents, coming to try to get her out of a convent.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. for example Wolfgang S. Seiferth, *Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages: Two Symbols in Art and Literature*, trans. by Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald (New York: Ungar, 1970); Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance: The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the 'Bible moralisée'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Shachar, *The Judensau*.

Jews desecrating Christian icons,<sup>115</sup> and the plots of other narratives involved such things as Jewish ritual murder, use of Christian blood and desecration of the Eucharist.<sup>116</sup> That some of the narratives were believed is shown by the fact that historical Jewish communities were accused of carrying out these activities. Ritual murder charges began with the case of William of Norwich in 1144 and continued throughout the late medieval period,<sup>117</sup> and host desecration charges began in the thirteenth century.<sup>118</sup>

The rise of affective piety, which included Christ-centred devotion, with cults of the Five Wounds and the Sacred Heart, cults of the Virgin and the image of the Pietà, public devotional activity such as mass healings and pilgrimage,<sup>119</sup> and the existence of written affective material, such as saints' lives like the *Legenda* or *Mirk's Festial*, meditations on the life of Christ<sup>120</sup> or the visions of Julian of Norwich,<sup>121</sup> may have contributed to anti-Jewish sentiment and action. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, R. Po-Chia Hsia cites religious developments such as a desire on the part of worshippers to witness the elevation of the host or Christian relics, a proliferation of images of the Crucifixion, and a variety of Passion masses.<sup>122</sup> If, argues Hsia, lay Christians were identifying themselves with Christ's suffering and with the Holy Family, this contributed to their reaction to apparent

<sup>115</sup> On icon desecration by Jews, cf. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, pp. 118-123. It should be noted that the *Legenda Aurea* contains tales of icon desecration by Jews, but none of ritual murder or of host desecration, presumably because, despite the thirteenth-century date of the *Legenda's* compilation, most of its material regarding Jews is of an earlier provenance than the rise of either ritual murder or host desecration narratives.

<sup>116</sup> On blood libel and other images of the hostile and corrupting Jew, cf. for example Stow, *Alienated Minority*, pp. 234-9. Cf. also Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, pp. 109-23 (host desecration), 124-39 (ritual murder), and 140-55 (use of Christian blood); and Rubin, *Gentile Tales*.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Hsia, pp. 2-3.

<sup>118</sup> According to Trachtenberg (*The Devil and the Jews*, p. 114), the first accusation of host desecration 'occurred in 1243, at Belitz, near Berlin', when 'all the Jews of the city were burned on the spot subsequently called the *Judenberg*'. Rubin (*Gentile Tales*, p. 40) gives the 'first fully documented case of a complete host desecration accusation' as occurring in Paris in 1290, although (pp. 32-9) she also cites earlier tales and images of negative or abusive interactions between Jews and the Eucharist.

<sup>119</sup> On these forms of popular devotion, see R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-c. 1515* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 138-168.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Ital. 115, trans. by Isa Ragusa, ed. by Ragusa and Rosalie Green (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love: Short Text and Long Text*, trans. by Elizabeth Spearing (London: Penguin, 1998).

instances of ritual murder: '[w]hat greater sacrilege could be committed against divinity and community when [sic] Christian children, martyrs like Christ, were kidnapped and slaughtered?'<sup>123</sup> Preaching, the Christian festivals and public performances of religious drama may also have had an effect on the perception and treatment of contemporary Jews, as R. N. Swanson points out:

The anti-Jewish violence responded to a variety of triggers. Sometimes it was calendrical, tending to occur at major Christian feasts, notably Christmas, Easter, and Corpus Christi. Attacks on Jews almost became part of the liturgical round, as at Gerona in Spain. The sermons delivered to Jews, berating their obstinate refusal to accept Christ, stirred up their Christian auditories even more. Plays depicting Jewish involvement in the Crucifixion, or host desecrations, similarly produced a violent response.<sup>124</sup>

Swanson mentions, however, that steps were sometimes taken by Christian authorities to ban anti-Jewish performances or to protect Jewish homes for their duration.<sup>125</sup> Nonetheless, it is tempting to view developments in late medieval Christian piety as helping to create a climate in which both anti-Jewish narratives and anti-Jewish violence could flourish.

The vivid and blood-soaked narratives of Jewish attacks on Christian bodies and icons found in late-medieval story collections seem to have little in common with the measured reason of scholastics like Abelard and Aquinas. Yet all of the conclusions of the great scholars, from the subtle dehumanisation of the Jew resulting from the implication that Jews lack fully human reason, to their findings on the culpability of Jews for the crime of deicide, are relevant to the social realities of Christian treatment of Jews, even if the relationship is not a directly causal one. It is often said truly that popes, clerics and theologians advocated protection of the Jews and cessation of anti-Jewish violence; Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, journeyed to the Rhineland at the time of the Second Crusade in order to prevent a repeat of the pogroms that had accompanied the First Crusade, and his letters urging protection of

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<sup>122</sup> Hsia, pp. 10-12.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>124</sup> Swanson, p. 279.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

the Jews cite Augustinian witness doctrine.<sup>126</sup> As Cohen points out, however, although Bernard was celebrated as a protector by contemporary Jews,<sup>127</sup> he nonetheless, following Augustine, saw the usefulness of Jews ‘in the divine economy of salvation’ as being ‘best fostered by their dispersion, preservation, and subjugation in Christendom [...]’.<sup>128</sup>

Throughout the early and medieval periods, even when humanitarianism, ecclesiastical practice or witness theory were invoked as reasons for tolerance, there was rarely any question, as far as theologians, preachers and secular rulers were concerned, of Jewish religiosity being accepted as equal to but different from Christian religiosity. The ‘hermeneutic Jew’ was constructed as tolerable in a direct ratio to how well he or she performed the task of facilitating Christian goals. In terms of salvation history, the Pauline concept of Israel’s eventual conversion amounted to a contract with God, which stipulated that the preservation of Jews was essential to the divine purpose. In more pragmatic terms, the utility of the Jew was largely educative. For Augustine, the Jews through their prophetic writings taught pagans and heretics the truth of the Christian faith. For compilers of works like the *Legenda*, accounts of Jewish participation in Christian miracles provided Christian readers not only with proofs of sanctity but with moral guidance as well. Furthermore, in an age when Jews were claiming to defeat Christians in religious disputation and when the radical solution of expulsion was increasingly seen as the most effective way of combating a perceived Jewish threat, containment of Jewish subversion within the confines of the miracle tale could provide reassurance that the power of the Christian God, shown through miracles, was sufficient to overcome the disbelief and hostility and neutralise the dangerous otherness of the Jew.

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<sup>126</sup> Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 234.

<sup>127</sup> Ephraim of Bonn lauded Bernard for his efforts on behalf of the Jews, calling him a ‘decent priest’, in his lament the *Sefer Zekhirah*, cited in *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 221.

<sup>128</sup> *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 244.

## Chapter Two: Miracles and Icons

In the middle ages, narratives about miracles gave the hearers exposure to religious themes and doctrines in story form. The miracle narratives they were likely to hear or to relate were not scholastic treatises on miracles, but short, lively stories about miracles as events, dramatic manifestations of religious truth in the form of crosses that protected against demons, or statues that talked and bled. In the *Legenda Aurea*, saints' lives, events from the lives of Christ and Mary or the history of the True Cross provide contexts within which miracle stories are played out. The tales emphasise the defining 'shape' of a medieval Christian miracle that identifies it in narratives *as* a miracle, rather than, for example, an act of Jewish sorcery. The defining characteristics of Christian miracles are used in the tales as a way of exploring the differences, as seen by early and medieval Christian writers, between Jews and Christians, the old Law and the new.

But Christian miracles do not only define Jewish difference in the tales. They also establish the centrality of the Jewish characters. There is a repeated pattern in medieval Christian miracle narratives concerning Jews, perhaps common enough to be called a rule. This is that where miracle narratives feature Jewish characters, the miracle is most often brought about by a Jewish character or characters, rather than by a Christian or Christians. The norm is for the miracle to be brought about by Jewish agency, either directly in response to Jewish actions, or through the medium of a saint responding to Jewish goading. In the tales we are going to discuss in Chapters Three to Five, Jewish characters play a part in bringing Christian miracles about, and they themselves are altered as a result. The Jewish actions that trigger the miracle may be hostile, and involve violent assaults on Christian icons or, in late-medieval blood libel or host desecration tales, on Christians themselves. However, in Chapter Four we will discuss tales in which a Jew brings the miracle about by means of non-hostile actions, such as prayer or invoking the sign of the cross.



The subject of medieval miracles is a huge one,<sup>1</sup> and the following discussion will focus on aspects that are particularly relevant to the relationship between Jews and miracles in the *Legenda* tales. Chief among these is the use of miracle tales as a form of persuasive rhetoric. Miracle narratives are ‘stories [...] told to assert divine approval, usually for ecclesiastical or secular politics.’<sup>2</sup> In medieval Christian miracle tales, the miracle demonstrates the sanctity of a saint or holy figure, and more generally shows that ‘divine approval’ is bestowed upon the Christian faith. Thus, when the tales feature Christian encounters with Jews, the occurrence of a miracle demonstrates the correctness of the Christian perspective and the faultiness of Jewish unbelief. Christian miracles are often shown to involve healing and resurrection, the attributes of Christ’s miracles in the gospels. These specific qualities of Christian miracles may also be used to signal the differences between miracles and magic, and this can be explored in the tales as a way of marking miraculous events that do not have a Christian provenance and purpose as being inferior, or even demonic, in nature. However, miracles may also be punitive, and Jewish characters portrayed as receiving just punishment for misdeeds and unbelief.

A number of the *Legenda* tales depict Jewish interaction with Christian icons, images and symbols. In the mythic discourse of the tales, icons and crosses are loci where miraculous occurrences are generated. The interaction of Jews with these items creates a transformative space in which Jews interact with the saint or holy figure the image represents, and engage with key moments in Christian history, most notably the Crucifixion. A great part of the following discussion will therefore look at the medieval attitudes towards such images and symbols, and how they were thought to be able to produce miraculous manifestations. The relationship between miracles and conversion is also central, since in the tales one of the most important functions of the miracles was the power to bring about the conversion of the Jew.

Despite the fact that medieval miracle tales treat miracles as real events, for the purposes of this discussion we will view miracles primarily not as phenomena but

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<sup>1</sup> Two good books focusing predominantly on medieval saints’ miracles and pilgrimage are Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event, 1000-1215* (London: Scolar, 1982), and Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London: Dent, 1977). A large selection of medieval miracles, listed by type, is given in C. Grant Loomis, *White Magic: An Introduction to the Folklore of Christian Legend* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1948).

<sup>2</sup> Ward, p. 201.

as elements of narrative. This follows from the fact that when we speak of miracles, unless witnessed at first hand, we are in actuality always speaking about miracle *narratives*. Benedicta Ward points out that, '[t]he first record of a 'miracle' includes a certain amount of interpretation of events, which increases with every repetition and rearrangement of the tale in other contexts'.<sup>3</sup> Legendary accounts, like the ones compiled by Jacobus in the *Legenda*, are inevitably partly made up of literary borrowings, and told in ways that underscore the theological points that the authors or author/compiler wish to make. What kind of 'event' might in fact precede a miracle narrative is a difficult question, even regarding a modern-day event. While historians can in some cases link narratives to particular events, as Miri Rubin convincingly does in the case of European host-desecration narratives and acts of violence towards Jewish communities,<sup>4</sup> it is on the whole the effects, rather than the origins, of these narratives that she examines. However much a medieval populace might have taken miracle narratives at face value, and of course the persuasive efficacy of the narratives depended on their being taken at face value, what they offer to the scholar is largely an exploration of intertextuality. The miracles 'themselves' remain an unknown quantity, impossible to detach from the level of narrative and assign to the level of 'real' event.<sup>5</sup> While the hearers of such narratives may have accepted miracles as historical events, here we are above all concerned with their function as plot devices, playing a key role in persuasive narrative strategies.

In order to understand these narratives, however, we need to know what kind of phenomena early and medieval Christian thinkers, writers and worshippers understood miracles to be. In terms of content, what distinguishes a miracle narrative is that among the events it describes, one or more have a miraculous character. On the simplest level, this is to say that the event/s in question would be considered, if occurring in reality, to contravene natural laws. Thus, 'miracle' is, broadly speaking, used here to refer to phenomena that appear in some way to contravene the course of nature.<sup>6</sup> The term 'miracles' may correspond to such Latin terms as '*miracula*',

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> Rubin, *Gentile Tales*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ward, pp. 201-13.

<sup>6</sup> For a lucid discussion of nature and natural law as 'canons of the ordinary' as they relate to the classical tradition, see Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian conflict over Miracle in the Second Century*,

'*mirabilia*', '*prodigia*' and '*monstra*'.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note, however, that in miracle tales, the *miraculum* which featured as a pivotal plot event was not treated simply as a wonder, an event *contra naturam*. It was, as Ward says with regard to Augustine's discussion of miracle, a manifestation of the power of God.<sup>8</sup> Within medieval Christian discourse, miracles occupied a special category of *signa*, or signs from God.<sup>9</sup>

In medieval Christian terms, then, as well as in the Jewish and classical traditions, miracles could be seen as signs which indicated 'the ordinary life of heaven made manifest in earthly affairs'<sup>10</sup> – the true, perhaps hidden, structure of a reality ultimately governed not by conditions on earth but by divine providence. The nature of this reality is either assumed or foregrounded or both, within a miracle narrative belonging to these traditions. These ideas may be summarised as follows. Firstly, that there exists a plane of reality, invisible to humans, inhabited by a divine being or beings. Secondly, that humanity exists on another plane of reality, which is subject to certain physical, 'natural' laws. Thirdly, that the divine plane is hierarchically superior, and its inhabitants have the power to interfere in human events and to contravene natural laws. Fourthly, that benign divine intervention can function as a sign that a particular human or group of humans enjoys divine support and protection, and that this confers superior status in the human world.

One possible implication of the contravention of natural law by God or his agents is that the plane on which natural law governs is not only subordinate but imperfect or even illusory, a product of the faulty perceptions of its human inhabitants. This view of reality was endorsed in the earliest Christian texts, as when St Paul said that we see 'through a glass in a dark manner' rather than 'face to face' (I Cor. 13. 12). Thus, while on the human level nature and history offered discourses that revealed God's order and purpose, both of these were subject to secondary laws, like the laws of nature, and did not represent the highest order. This highest order could then at times be revealed by means of a perceived disruption to the lower

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Patristic Monograph Series, No. 10 (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983), pp. 7-26, and particularly sections 2.3 through 2.5, pp. 13-24.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ward, p. 4. Also cf. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. by R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 21.8, p. 1063.

<sup>8</sup> Ward, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 24-5 and p. 216.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

order, and this kind of sign was termed a 'miracle'. Aquinas, for example, said that 'These works that are sometimes done by God outside the usual order assigned to things are wont to be called miracles' (*'illa igitur proprie miracula dicenda sunt quae divinitus fiunt praeter ordinem communiter observatum in rebus'*).<sup>11</sup> Miracles could have a revelatory function, offering a view of the laws or conditions that prevail on the higher plane. Aquinas said that 'Just as man is able, following the lead of his natural reason, to come to a certain knowledge of God by means of His natural effects, he is similarly led by some supernatural effects, which we call miracles, to a certain supernatural knowledge of those things which must be believed' (*'sicut ductu naturalis rationis homo pervenire potest ad aliquam Dei notitiam per effectus naturales, ita per aliquos supernaturales effectus, qui miracula dicuntur, in aliquam supernaturalem cognitionem credendorum homo adducitur'*).<sup>12</sup>

In medieval Christian narrative, it is assumed or explicitly stated that the divine plane belongs to the Christian God alone, and that miraculous intervention reveals this truth, to the benefit of Christians as well as any unbelievers prepared to accept conversion. However, the citation of miraculous events as a proof of the superior status and/or divine attributes of an individual or group does not originate with Christianity, being found in narratives from the classical world and from the Hebrew scriptures as well as in the Christian tradition. In a remark made about medieval Christian practice, but applicable also in Jewish and pagan contexts, Benedicta Ward says that the 'detection of the hand of God in political events was set within a wider view of history itself as propaganda, in which the rise and fall of nations were signs from God to men'.<sup>13</sup>

In the classical world, there were legends about miraculous signs connected with the lives of the emperors: the encounter of Augustus' mother with a serpent in the shrine of Apollo and his father's dream of Augustus crowned and sceptred in a heavenly chariot indicated his connection with the gods and destined rulership, although portents could also be negative, such as those foretelling the death of

<sup>11</sup> English, *The Summa Contra Gentiles of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by the English Dominican Fathers, 5 vols (London: Burns, 1924-9) III, part II, 101, p. 60; Latin, *SCG* III.II, col. 776b.

<sup>12</sup> English translation by Michael L. Kay; Latin, *ST* II-II (Vol. III), Q. 178, Art. I, cols 2301b-2302a. A discussion of the medieval Christian theory of miracles can be found in Ward, pp. 3-32.

<sup>13</sup> Ward, p. 201.

Caesar.<sup>14</sup> Vergil uses the idea of portents supporting the imperial office in the *Aeneid*, where the son of Julius Caesar is described as the ‘son of a god’, destined to ‘set up the Golden Age’, whose empire will spread to ‘a land that lies beyond the stars [...] and the sun’, and against whose coming the land shudders and the mouths of the Nile ‘are in tumult’.<sup>15</sup> This passage shows many parallels with Jewish apocalyptic writings and even more with later Christian messianic ideas: the promised ruler is a son of God, who will instigate a new age and bring an end to the reign of evil; his rule will be not merely an earthly rule but one extending to the heavenly realm; and his coming is predestined and was prophesied and foretold by signs. Miraculous signs, including fulfilled prophecies, portents and disruptions of the natural order, are described here as potent proofs of an emperor’s right to rule.

The idea of divine or miraculous signs signalling privileged status was of course a central theme of the Hebrew scriptures. If we take Joshua as an example from the Tanakh (the Jewish scriptures, composed of Law, Prophets and Writings), we find references to the ‘signs’ by which the Israelites recognise themselves as divinely chosen:

The Lord our God he brought us and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage: and did very great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way by which we journeyed, and among all the people through whom we passed. (Jos. 24. 17).

Some of the divine acts of protection and guidance referred to in Joshua have a more ‘miraculous’ flavour than others, in the sense of ‘wonders’ or events which clearly contravene laws of nature. Among these are the plagues sent down on Egypt, and the parting of the Red Sea. However, although events *contra naturam* are described in Joshua, much of the narrative is taken up with more general images of guidance and deliverance: ‘I took your father Abraham from the borders of Mesopotamia: and brought him into the land of Chanaan: and I multiplied his seed, And gave him Isaac’ (Jos. 24. 3-4). Throughout this chapter of Joshua, the emphasis is on the larger

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<sup>14</sup> Howard Clark Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 174-7, citing Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, Augustus, 94-7, and Julius, 81.

<sup>15</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough (London: Heinemann, 1960) Book 6, ll. 789-800, pp. 561-3.



category of sign rather than on the miraculous contravention of nature per se. But miracles and other signs all support the revelation of a grand narrative and philosophy of history, whereby God enters into a *b'rit*, or covenant, with Israel. The Israelite identity constructed in Joshua is of a people set apart by a special relationship with God, which is demonstrated by signs and miracles.

It was this same set of concepts that constituted the matrix in which the early Christians began to shape their faith. For early Christians, Old Testament passages describing God's guidance of the Jews had a 'spiritual' meaning, signifying the status of Christianity as the 'new Israel'. The events of the Old Testament, including the signs and miracles performed for the benefit of the Israelites, could be read as 'figures of future things (*figuras [...] futurorum*)',<sup>16</sup> and given a Christian interpretation. Augustine cites an example:

Christ appears to me in the rod of Moses, which became a serpent when cast on the earth as a figure of His death, which came from the serpent. (*Ipse mihi innuitur in virga Moysi, quae in terra serpens effecta, ejus mortem figuravit a serpente venientem [...]*)<sup>17</sup>

In the example given, Moses' rod is a figure or a 'type' of Christ.<sup>18</sup> Typological reading of this kind was intended to show that 'the Old bears witness to the New' ('*Veteris [quippe] testificatio, fidem Novo conciliat*').<sup>19</sup> By means of this hermeneutical practice, early Christian literature re-inscribed the signs and miracles of the Jewish scriptures in order to identify the Christian sect with the unique, divinely favoured identity of Israel that the scriptures constructed.

The theme of miraculous proof was carried over into the Christian gospels. Christ was portrayed as a miracle-worker who used miracles not only to heal and to nurture, but also to persuade and to teach. His miracles were also adduced as proof that he was the messiah and the fulfilment of biblical prophecy, as when Christ heals a group possessed by devils 'That it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet Isaias, saying: He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases' (Matt. 8. 17). Howard Kee speaks about Jesus and his disciples as 'agents of divine triumph' in the

<sup>16</sup> 'Reply to Faustus', 4.2, p. 161; Latin, *Contra Faustum*, PL 42, 4.2, col. 218.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12.28, p. 192; Latin, *ibid.*, 112.28, col. 269.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ward, pp. 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> 'Reply to Faustus' 4.2, p. 161; Latin, *Contra Faustum*, 4.2, col. 218.



‘Q’ source,<sup>20</sup> and shows how, in the gospel of Mark, miracles can act as ‘heavenly confirmations’ of Christ’s divine role.<sup>21</sup> In identifying Christ as the messiah identified by the Old Testament prophets, the gospels referred back to the ‘divinely chosen’ and miraculously signed identity of the people of Israel in the Tanakh.

However, Christ’s miracles were also used in the gospel narratives to talk about specific qualities that the authors wanted to portray as innovative and peculiar to the Christian sect. Christ performed miracles of healing, of raising the dead, of providing miraculous sustenance, of calming the sea and of walking on water, and claimed to have the power of forgiving sins. The exegesis provided in the gospels treated these miracles as signs, not only of Christ’s divinity, but also of the nature of things on the divine plane. Thus, for example, in Matthew 9. 6, it is stated that the miracle of healing is performed ‘that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins’. The narrators described miracles in such a way as to foreground their revelatory quality and persuade readers of the necessity of faith, the divine authority of Christ and the specific characteristics of a transcendent reality: healing, mercy, forgiveness and restoration or resurrection of the flesh.

As we shall see, in medieval miracle tales involving Jews, these patterns, laid down in the New Testament, were repeated. The qualities of healing and resurrection were often assigned to Christian miracles and their opposite to Jewish behaviour of various kinds, although this was by no means a clear-cut rule and depended, as we shall see, on what kind of supposed Jewish behaviour was evoked in a given tale. However, foregrounding the Christian qualities of miracles, their powers of healing and resurrection, was a technique used in the tales to represent Christian miracles as being distinct from magic.<sup>22</sup> Jews could be associated with the devil or demons and with sorcery in the Christian tradition,<sup>23</sup> and acts of magic might be ascribed to Jewish characters in miracle tales. Chapter Five will look at the legend of St Silvester, in which a Jew’s act of magic is answered by a corresponding miracle by

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<sup>20</sup> Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World*, p. 156 ff.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159 ff.

<sup>22</sup> An overview of scholarly distinctions between miracles and magic is given by Andy M. Reimer, *Miracle and Magic: A Study in the Acts of the Apostles and the Life of Appolonius of Tyana* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) pp. 1-46.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*.

the saint. In this tale, the differences between the Jewish sorcery, which only brings death, and the Christian miracle, which has the power of resurrection, are stressed.

As well as Christ's miracles of resurrection and healing, his passion and crucifixion helped shape medieval Christian ideas about miracles. Accounts of the martyrdom of early Christians made use of the pattern of *imitatio Christi* which the martyrs' deaths followed. Discussing the death of 'the first martyr' for Christ, Stephen, in his book *Making Saints*, Kenneth Woodward shows how the stages of Stephen's ministry, arrest and death parallel those of Christ:

Like Jesus, Stephen is described as a wonder-worker and preacher of great power. Again like Jesus, he incites the enmity of Jewish elders and scribes. [...] At the close, he is taken outside the city and stoned. He dies begging God's forgiveness of his executioners.

The purpose of the narrative is to show that Stephen imitated the passion and death of Christ. [...] The Christian community was able to recognize Stephen as a saint *only* by way of analogy with the story of Jesus' passion and death. [...] To be a saint, then, was to die not only *for* Christ but *like* him.<sup>24</sup>

The glory of such a death is stressed in tales of the martyrs: Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch in the early second century, wrote 'I am God's grain, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread', and, 'the nearer the sword, the nearer to God'.<sup>25</sup> Tales of the early martyrs are sometimes miracle tales as well. The slave Blandina was miraculously spared in the arena when the animals refused to touch her. Later, however, she succumbed to a combination of tortures, culminating in being gored by a bull.<sup>26</sup> When Bishop Polycarp was in the arena, he was to be burned, but 'the flames licked round the stake in a hollow circle, not touching the body'. When he was finally despatched with a sword his blood gushed forth, putting out the fire.<sup>27</sup>

The early martyrdom narratives provided reassurance to Christians. The tales sought to demonstrate that suffering persecution (and by extension perhaps any

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: Inside the Vatican: Who Become Saints, Who Do Not, And Why* (London: Chatto, 1991), p.53; cf. also Ward, p. 167.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in J. W. C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to A.D. 500* (London: Methuen, 1937, 1963), p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-5.

<sup>27</sup> 'The Martyrdom of Polycarp', in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. by Maxwell Staniforth, revised by Andrew Louth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 125-135 (p. 130).

suffering borne in a Christian manner) was an indication of sanctity, not of guilt, and miracles, where included, helped support this contention. This attitude towards the relationship between Christian virtue and the adversity undergone by early Christians may be contrasted with medieval Christian anti-Jewish polemic. Such polemic often suggests, following Augustine and the early apologists, that the persecutions and dispersal suffered by the Jews at the close of the Second Temple period, far from indicating virtue, was a sign of their sinful, carnal and unenlightened status. The situation of the Jews could thus be used as an example to help illustrate the consequences of rejecting Christ: St Bernard wrote that '[The Jews] are dispersed all over the world so that by expiating their crime they may be everywhere the living witnesses of our redemption'.<sup>28</sup> The ordeals endured by the Christian martyrs, on the other hand, were represented as a sign that they had taken Christ's sufferings upon themselves, and their deaths were thereby sanctified and ennobled.

It is notable in these narratives of martyrdom that the miracles, while signing the sanctity of the Christians who die like Christ, do not save their bodies from undergoing this death. We may understand more about the necessity, in narrative terms, for the occurrence of a holy death in early and medieval Christian narratives, when we consider that the 'death' required in stories about early and later Christian saints was not always a literal one: 'Saints were those who had died, or were willing to die, or pursued a slow death to the world as a way of imitating Christ'.<sup>29</sup> The original narrative form expanded to incorporate ideas about 'death' which encompassed symbolic as well as actual death. What the narrative structure of miracle and martyrdom, or of the saint who 'dies to the world', suggests in theological terms is that it is necessary to die to one life in order to be reborn in another. This pattern thus not only reflects the structure of crucifixion/resurrection, but also of the 'death' and 'rebirth' that constituted the spiritual core both of baptism and of conversion. This theme, visited over and over again by means of varying images and metaphors, is, as we shall see, very relevant to the depiction of Jewish conversion in the miracle tales.

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<sup>28</sup> Letter 391.6, *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. by Bruno Scott James (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), p. 462, from MS. 14845, fol. 257, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (not previously published; absent from Latin editions).

<sup>29</sup> Woodward, p. 54.

Whether literal or symbolic, these tales of Christian martyrdom and sainthood were 'about' Christ in a different way from the gospel texts. As Ward points out with regard to later narratives of saints' healing, these stories show Christ working not directly, but through the saints, and saints causing miracles, not through their own power, but by the power of Christ.<sup>30</sup> The pattern of *imitatio Christi* that became a feature of later Christian miracle narrative referred back to the text of the gospels, using techniques resembling the *ars memoria* in recalling the events of the crucifixion to hearers of these tales. Speaking about the early and medieval art of memory, Mary Carruthers finds that memory has a persuasive and affective function. 'Though it is certainly a form of knowing, recollecting is also a matter of will, of being *moved*, pre-eminently a moral activity'.<sup>31</sup> The stories of the early martyrs are structured to evoke memories of Christ's life and death with just such a moral purpose.

The idea of *imitatio Christi* is especially important for an understanding of Christian miracle tales involving Jews: Christ's death provided a paradigm for miracle tales involving Jewish attacks on images of Christ or on the Eucharist. Like the saints and martyrs, the Host and Christian images could undergo martyrdom in miracle tales, and the Jews were on hand to act the part of tormentors and murderers. However, the relationship in the *Legenda* between Jews and Christianity was, as we shall discuss, vastly more complex than the simple idea of Jews serving as a negative example. Jews were portrayed as re-enacting the events of Christ's passion and death, whether in the role of Christ-killers or of Christian converts who, in being baptised, imitated Christ in undergoing spiritual death and resurrection. Jewish characters might enact both these roles in the course of a single tale.

The themes of spiritual death and rebirth occur in the *Legenda* in stories about the lives of the Christian saints, who were themselves both Christian intercessors and imitators of Christ. Saints' miracles were a confirmation that a life and death following the pattern of *imitatio Christi* was a way of transcending carnal humanity, so as to be able to aspire to an elevated status after death. The life of the saint constituted an example to be followed for all believers. The revelation of mercy and the saintly example may well have been considered by hagiographers like

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Ward, pp. 170-1.

<sup>31</sup> *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 67-8.

Jacobus, if not to the people who flocked to the shrines, as being more valuable than the cure itself. This has parallels in the gospel texts, in which the revelations concerning healing, resurrection, forgiveness of sin and the divinity of Christ were treated by the authors of the gospels as being more valuable than his healings per se. Saints' miracles themselves could be of varying kinds. When living saints performed cures, they worked through the media of prayer, the sign of the cross or other holy practices or objects so that it was seen to be 'still Christ who works miracles through his saints, not that they can work miracles in their own power'.<sup>32</sup>

It should, however, be noted here that not all saints' miracles were miracles of healing. Tales were also told of posthumous saints generating miraculous punishments of wrongdoers or those who neglected or insulted the saint.<sup>33</sup> Ronald Finucane cites an example of a woman who had become blind after visiting Becket's tomb; when another woman mocked her, she was herself blinded. Another story about the same tomb related that a knight's family was struck down by illness when they broke a promise to visit the tomb.<sup>34</sup> In the *Legenda* and other sources, Jews may be punished before or instead of converting. In these tales, Jewish conversion may follow a symbolic miraculous punishment such as silencing (negating dissident religious discourse) or blinding (a literal representation of the Jews' supposed lack of spiritual understanding).<sup>35</sup>

An example of a punitive miracle in which a Jew is struck dumb comes from St. George the Hagiorite, ca. 1000-25, about an Archbishop who is debating with a Jew in the presence of one Father Euthymios. When the Jew insults Christianity, Father Euthymios causes him to be struck dumb and his mouth distorted. The Jew's speech is restored when the sign of the cross is made over him, and he subsequently converts. Another, very similar story results instead in the Jew's death following his

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Loomis, *White Magic*, who lists a wide variety of punitive miracles, pp. 55-7 and pp. 97-102.

<sup>34</sup> Finucane, pp. 34-5, citing *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, RS 67, II.206.

<sup>35</sup> In the *Legenda* 'Assumption of the Virgin', the chief priest of the Jews attempts an attack on the bier carrying the body of the Virgin, and his hands are withered and stick to the bier, while his fellow-Jews are stricken blind (*GL* II, p. 81; *LA*, pp. 508-9). In other versions cited by Jacobus, the priest loses the power of touch, and has both hands torn from his body and adhere to the bier (*GL* II, pp. 91-2, *LA*, pp. 520-1), or loses only one hand (*GL* II, pp. 94-5, *LA*, p. 524.) This legend is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.



dumbness.<sup>36</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach recounts a tale of a young Christian clerk discovered sleeping with a Jewish girl. When the girl's father and a group of friends confront the clerk next day in church, the terrified clerk prays to God to be delivered, promising to make amends. When the Jews attempt to accuse the clerk, they are struck dumb. The clerk is persuaded to marry the Jewish girl, who converts. Caesarius comments that good came of the clerks' contrition, citing amongst other things that 'the Jews were put to silence'.<sup>37</sup>

The assumption seems to be that, regardless of the specific circumstances, Jewish voices are anti-Christian and must be silenced. The general guilt of all Jews is mentioned in the *Legenda*, citing Chrysostom's comments on the reaction of the Jews at the Last Judgement:

The Jews will lament, seeing the One they thought of as a dead man now living and life-giving, and at the sight of his wounded body will be unable to deny their crime [...]. ([...] *plangent se Judaei videntes viventem et vivificantem, quem quasi hominem mortuum existimabant, et consurgentes se corpori vulnerato scelus suum denegare non poterunt.*)<sup>38</sup>

Jews are here seen as deserving of punishment through their own fault. Although punitive miracles may seem harsh and vindictive, it could be argued, particularly in cases of symbolic punishments like blindness, that from the point of view of the narrator, the miracle simply reveals the Jew's true spiritual state, which can then be healed by conversion.<sup>39</sup> Punitive miracles in general do not seem as effective an apology for Christianity as miracles of healing and resurrection, but perhaps served a didactic purpose of warning the faithful of the consequences of negative behaviour, and may have contributed in some cases to the creation of the mythic character attributed to a posthumous saint, depicting the saint as a powerful avenger.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Joshua Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641-1204* (Athen, 1939; Farnborough: Gregg, 1969), pp. 170-1, citing St George the Hagiorite's lives of St. John and St. Euthymios, Latin tr. from Georgian, P. Peeters, '*Histoires monastiques géorgiennes*'. *Analecta Bollandiana*, XXXVI-VII, 1917-19, 38f.

<sup>37</sup> *The Dialogue on Miracles*, I, 23, pp. 102-4, quote p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> 'The Advent of the Lord', *GL* I, p. 9; *LA*, p. 8, citing Chrysostom, *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum* (Cambridge University Library MS Kk II 20).

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of symbolic healings in the gospels, cf. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), pp. 88-90.

<sup>40</sup> On the saint as warrior, cf. John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp. 28-30, 34-46. Cf. also



Whether they were miracles of healing or of other kinds, miracles were increasingly important in the process of papal canonisation, which became a feature of the saints' cults in the high middle ages.<sup>41</sup> Benedicta Ward has shown how miracles associated with a living saint, which centred upon *imitatio Christi* and demonstrations of personal sanctity and could include visions and miraculous apparitions, differed from posthumous miracles, which were predominantly focused on the healing power of the saint's relics.<sup>42</sup> The miracles used in canonisation might be performed during the saint's life or be related to relics of the saint which showed miraculous powers. Preserved body parts of the saints and even of Christ himself were thought to perform miracles of healing; the saint's tomb was 'a *locus* where earth and heaven met in the person of the dead, made plain by some manifestation of supernatural power – some *virtus* – of some *miraculum*, some wonderful happening'.<sup>43</sup> The mysterious power thought to reside in relics is vividly described by Finucane:

Relics, especially the integral skeletons of widely-known saints, emitted a kind of holy radioactivity which bombarded everything in the area, and as early as the sixth century it was believed that objects placed next to them would absorb some of their power and grow heavier. They affected oil in lamps which burned above them, cloths placed nearby, water or wine which washed them, dust which settled on them, fragments of the tomb which enclosed them, gems or rings which touched them, the entire church which surrounded them, and of course the hopeful suppliants who approached to kiss, touch pray before and gaze upon them.<sup>44</sup>

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the punitive miracles of Martin of Tours, Sulpicius Severus, 'The Life of Saint Martin of Tours', in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, trans. by F. R. Hoare, ed. by Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head (Pennsylvania, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 1-29.

<sup>41</sup> According to Benedicta Ward, the term '*canonizare*,' referring to the saint's installation in the local church calendar, dates from the eleventh century, and following this, recognition of saints became increasingly a papal rather than an episcopal responsibility, so that appeals to papal courts were 'the rule' by the beginning of the thirteenth century (Ward, pp. 184-5). A cultic following was not enough to establish a saint in the eyes of ecclesiastical authorities. First, the divinely-sanctioned status of the saint must be determined, and then the authorised devotional practices could begin to accrete. (Ibid., pp. 184-91.) On authorised vs. unauthorised saints cf. Finucane, pp. 32-3; also cf. Finucane on real vs. fake relics, pp. 29-31, and on official authorisation of relics, p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> Ward, pp. 167-184.

<sup>43</sup> P. R. L. Brown, *Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours* (Reading: University of Reading Press, 1977), p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Finucane, p. 26. On the belief in objects absorbing power from relics, Finucane cites Gregory of Tours, *Libri Miraculorum*, PL 71, col. 729.

There was precedent for the power of relics in some classical traditions: Herodotus describes a quest for the bones of Orestes.<sup>45</sup> In the Jewish scriptures, the bones of Elisha restored a dead body to life.<sup>46</sup> In the Christian middle ages, holy bones were revered to the extent that they were ceremonially ‘translated’ from their burial-places and used to give status to religious establishments.<sup>47</sup>

However, it was not only the remnants of the physical bodies of saints that were thought to have this kind of power. There was a similarity in the popular veneration of relics and of images; in some miracle tales, images themselves, like relics, were depicted as producing ‘manifestation[s] of supernatural power’.<sup>48</sup> Tales involving Jewish interaction with icons of Christ, and Christian symbols such as the cross, rested on the idea that images could behave as if they were animated by the spirit of the holy individual depicted in the image. The idea of statues animated by spirits had been current in late antiquity: neo-Platonic texts describe the practice of summoning spirits into statues, ‘vivifying them and [...] causing them to deliver oracles’.<sup>49</sup> These theurgic practises did not continue into the Christian middle ages, yet throughout the medieval period, tales emerged in which religious statues and images generated miraculous manifestations, and sometimes became animate.

John of Damascus, without touching on the subject of the miraculous properties of images, nonetheless suggested that they were experienced as being more than just representations when he equated images with relics as being repositories of God’s grace:

The saints in their lifetime were filled with the Holy Spirit, and when they are no more, His grace abides with their spirits and with their bodies in their

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<sup>45</sup> Cited in Finucane, p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> 2 Kings 13. 21, cited in Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image-Worship in Ancient Paganism and in Christianity* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1940) p. 42.

<sup>47</sup> On *translatio* see Finucane, pp. 22-3 and 26-31.

<sup>48</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of Images before the Era of Art*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 6. On the supernatural power of images see also Bevan, pp. 143-5. On Greek images believed to possess grace due to a heavenly origin, cf. Bevan, pp. 78-9.

<sup>49</sup> Hans Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, ed. by Michel Tardieu (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), pp. 247-8; quotation p. 247, citing Proclus, various sources, e.g. *In Platonis Timaeum*, I, 51, 25. 273, 11. 330, 31. III, 6, 9. 155, 20.

tombs, and also with their likenesses and holy images, not by nature, but by grace and divine power.<sup>50</sup>

In his comprehensive work on medieval images, Hans Belting describes how a shift from relic-worship to image-worship could have taken place:

The relic as *pars pro toto* was the body of a saint, who remained present even in death and gave proof of his or her life by miracles. The statue represented this body of the saint and, as it were, was itself the saint's new body, which, like a living body, could also be set in motion in a procession. The bodylike sculpture made the saint physically present, while the golden surface made the saint appear as a supernatural person with a heavenly aura.<sup>51</sup>

In this view the statue is analogous to a fleshly body and can convey the holy presence to the onlooker or supplicant. Whether connected with a saint who left physical remains or with Christ and the Virgin,<sup>52</sup> images in popular devotion were treated not only as if they were imbued with spirit, but as if this could grant them powers such as motion or speech:

Authentic images seemed capable of action, seemed to possess *dynamis*, or supernatural power. God and the saints took up their abode in them, as was expected, and spoke through them.<sup>53</sup>

In miracle tales, statues and pictures might demonstrate 'grace and divine power' by bleeding, moving or speaking.

The idea of grace abiding in Christian images was reflected in tales about Jews attacking Christian icons, combining the idea of Jewish deicide with the idea of the miraculous power of images. In the tales with which we are concerned, they produced these manifestations in response to attacks by Jews, as if the Jews had

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<sup>50</sup> John Damascene (John of Damascus), *On Holy Images*, trans. by Mary H. Allies (London: Thomas Baker, 1898), Part I, pp. 21-2.

<sup>51</sup> Belting, p. 299.

<sup>52</sup> Belting points out that, since Christ and the Virgin left no relics, this exact analogy cannot apply to their images. Belting here ignores traditions of relics like the Holy Blood. However, he says, 'secondary' relics could be placed inside their statues, giving these a 'reliquary-like function'. Ibid., pp. 302-3. Belting compares this to the Buddhist practice of placing a relic inside a statue and thus giving it a 'soul'. He notes also the inversion of earlier medieval Christian practice in a devotional image of the fourteenth century in Siena; later panel paintings 'were produced with relics in their frames' (p. 308).

<sup>53</sup> Belting, p. 6.

actually carried out an attack on the holy individual, often Christ or the Virgin, represented by the image. In Byzantium, at the seventh Council of Nicea, it was stated that ‘when an icon is dishonoured the insult applies to the person who is depicted on the icon’, suggesting some degree of conflation between person and image.<sup>54</sup> This helps us to understand how an attack on an icon of Christ, whether by Christian iconoclasts or by Jews, could come to be treated in legend as an attack on Christ himself. Belting, however, contends that relics such as the cross of Lucca, conflated in legend with an image originating in Jerusalem that bled following a Jewish attack, were not considered to be ‘an incarnation of the person’; rather, their authority lay in their history.<sup>55</sup> Yet this object is rare amongst icons in having a legendary history, and there are many stories of images behaving like ‘incarnations’; Belting himself mentions stories of images that imitated ‘the behaviour of living people’, for example, in being able to see sins committed in front of their eyes.<sup>56</sup>

Belting does not equate western practice with the eastern cult of icons.<sup>57</sup> He notes that the relation between person and image was not of great concern to the theologians of the west, and says there was no theory there to explain the miraculous powers of images.<sup>58</sup> However, if, as we shall discuss, some legends collected in western sources have a Byzantine provenance, this may argue for a degree of shared faith and practice regarding icons. In the east, theory was certainly advanced to support the iconodules. Pope Gregory I famously defended images as books for the unlearned, saying that ‘What writing conveys to readers, pictures convey to the unlearned who see them, because, in pictures, even the ignorant can see what they should follow, and in them the illiterate can read’. (*Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis praestat pictura cernentibus, quia in ipsa etiam ignorantes vident quid sequi debeant, in ipsa legunt qui litteras nesciunt*)<sup>59</sup> John of Damascus defended

<sup>54</sup> Text of the sixth session of the seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicea, translated by Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto: U of T Press, 1968), p. 145.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 305. This legend of the bleeding image is discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 308. On the Byzantine theory of images in the *Libri Carolini*, distinguishing between relics, the true cross, and images made according to God’s command in the Old Testament, on the one hand, and man-made images on the other, see William Diebold, *Word and Image: an Introduction to Early Medieval Art* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 2000), pp. 100-103.

<sup>58</sup> Sahas, p. 305.

<sup>59</sup> Gregory I to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles, *Sancti Gregorii Magni Registri Epistolarum*, PL 77 (Paris: Migne, 1849) Book 9, Letter 13, col. 1128C. Cf. also Letter 105, cols 1027 C -1028 A: ‘The reason why images are used in churches is so that illiterate people, seeing the images on the walls,

icons because they had the power to mediate between human vision and the divine, so that 'spiritual contemplation' was reached through 'bodily sight', and 'by contemplating [Christ's] bodily form, we form a notion, as far as is possible for us, of the glory of His divinity'.<sup>60</sup> This constituted a subtle belief in the power that icons had over human sensibilities rather than a belief in an icon animated by a spirit. Yet John also stated that, 'we make images of God incarnate, and of his servants and friends, and with them we drive away the demonic hosts', and that the power of the Cross is such that 'by its mere shadow it burns up the demons and drives them far away from those who bear its seal'. In this view the icon's grace not only opens the spiritual sensibilities of mankind, but has the power to repel demonic forces. It is not clear how literally John meant this to be taken, but on the most literal level, this is much closer to the attitudes implicit in legend.

However, at the Council of Nicea it was also said that an icon is 'nothing else but an icon, signifying the imitation of the prototype' and that its name 'is the only thing it has in common' with the person depicted; the icon is without a soul.<sup>61</sup> The actual worship of icons and the miracle tales that could imply that the icon is in itself an ensouled being seem to have been without ecclesiastical endorsement; care is always taken to point out that it is God who is worshipped by means of the icon. This suggests perhaps a discrepancy between ecclesiastical pronouncements on images and their treatment in legend. It may be that miracle tales that endowed images with the attributes of 'living people' owed more to unofficial popular belief than to a worked-out theological doctrine. Belting points out that miraculous images could on occasion support the populace against the church, since they 'spoke without the church's mediation, with a voice directly from heaven, against which any official authority was powerless'.<sup>62</sup>

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may at any rate glean from them what they are unable to read in books' (*Idcirco enim pictura in Ecclesiis adhibetur, ut his qui litteras nesciunt, saltem in parietibus videndo legant quae legere in Codicibus non valent*). English translations by Michael L. Kay and the author.

<sup>60</sup> John of Damascus, *Apologies* III, 12, cited in Moshe Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 216, p. 218. For his translations, Barasch cites John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. by David Anderson (Crestwood, N.Y., 1980), p. 72.

<sup>61</sup> Barasch, p. 159.

<sup>62</sup> Belting, p. 6.



There is perhaps an analogy with medieval Christian images in Carabelli's work on votive images,<sup>63</sup> in particular his remarks on fetishes. Carabelli says fetishes 'are perfectly aniconic'<sup>64</sup> [...] in the sense that they do not represent divinities, but *are* divinities'. This is to do with the idea Carabelli cites from the work of eighteenth-century anthropologist Charles de Brosses, that, rather than being a representation, 'the fetish is an object taken at random without any reason'.<sup>65</sup> This view very probably represents a misunderstanding of the relationship of the fetish to the spirit world: in both Crow Indian society and among the Mende of Sierra Leone, for example, both natural fetish items such as rocks and crafted items are the product of dream guidance, conferring supernatural power and connecting their owners with the spirit world, and ultimately with the Creator.<sup>66</sup> This suggests that 'primitive' cultures have as potentially sophisticated an approach to the religious use of objects and images as did the proponents of the Christian use of images in Byzantium. However, the idea that fetishes are 'anti-allegorical'<sup>67</sup> is an intriguing one. Medieval images of Christ or the Virgin were allegorical or iconic insofar as they were thought to be representations only. However, in the miracle tales, such images were portrayed as acting like real bodies. The implication of this along with their transformative power and their ability to effect conversion is that the image in these tales was thought to house the spiritual presence of the deity. Not only did the image represent Christ, it was Christ. Thus these images were iconic and aniconic (in Carabelli's sense) at the same time.<sup>68</sup>

Western medieval theologians, even if they did not formulate an exact theory of images, did concern themselves with another case in which an object was identified with a holy body. This of course was the doctrine of transubstantiation,

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<sup>63</sup> Giancarlo Carabelli, *In the Image of Priapus*, (London: Duckworth, 1996)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 49. On the idea, Carabelli cites Charles de Brosses, *Du culte des dieux fétiches ou parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Égypte avec la religion actuelle de la Nigritie*, 1760. For the term 'aniconic' Carabelli cites Giuseppe Bellucci, 'Du culte de la pierre,' in *Congrès international d'anthropologie et d'archéologie préhistorique...1880* (Lisbonne: Académie Royale des Sciences, 1884), pp. 470-1.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, again citing de Brosses.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. William Wildschut, *Crow Indian Medicine Bundles*, (New York: Heye Foundation, 1960), pp. 1-10, 105-6 and 161-6, and Anthony J. Gittins, *Mende Religion: Aspects of Belief and Thought in Sierra Leone*, (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1987), p. 105.

<sup>67</sup> Carabelli, p. 51.

<sup>68</sup> On the worship of aniconic objects in ancient cultures, see Bevan, pp. 14-16.



involving the relationship between Christ's historical flesh and blood and the host.<sup>69</sup> The host was believed to become the actual body of Christ. Thus, to believers it was thought of according to the view of Dionysius the Aeropagite that '[s]ymbolon [...] is not only a sign, but the thing itself.'<sup>70</sup> The host was no longer merely an image: '[o]nce the image of the host is transformed in transubstantiation, the careful hierarchy of images as referents or signs [...] breaks down'.<sup>71</sup> Its status as a point of doctrine made the host unique among Christian symbols and paraphernalia, in having its symbolic status officially, as it were, 'under erasure': the physical object, the wafer, being reduced to an 'accident' or appearance. Miri Rubin discusses Wycliffite and Lollard objections to the Eucharist that 'attacked the very epistemology which did not differentiate sign from signified', refusing to accept the mystery whereby the Host ceases to be a representation.<sup>72</sup> Thus, at least in the eyes of some of its contemporary critics, a clear distinction between the sacrament of the Eucharist and the worship of images could not be made.

In legend, the host miraculously transformed into flesh, the Christ child or the suffering Christ; in host-desecration stories, in response to attacks by Jews.<sup>73</sup> But in medieval tales and legends, the host was not unique in manifesting the presence of God. In popular religious culture at least, images could be treated as if they, too, underwent a mystery like that of transubstantiation. The behaviour of crosses and images in miracle stories suggests that an analogous transformation to that undergone by the Eucharist was believed in, if not as doctrine, as an unofficial, unauthorised complement to transubstantiation itself:

Just as Christ resided physically in the host, so he was present in the crucifixes and other representations of him that adorned Christian homes and churches, and so were the other holy personages of Christianity believed to be literally and physically present in their images and paintings. This was not

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<sup>69</sup> For a comprehensive account of the development of Eucharistic theology in the high middle ages cf. Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), esp. pp. 14-35.

<sup>70</sup> Barasch, p. 167.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p. 218.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326. Cf. also Barasch on the 'iconic sign', which 'has itself the properties of what it designates'; *Icon*, p. 197.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*.

officially sanctioned doctrine, it is true, but it was nonetheless part and parcel of the average Christian's beliefs.<sup>74</sup>

This kind of belief may stray into what Barasch calls 'the domain of evocative suggestions, of beliefs that are not fully thought through, of ambiguities'.<sup>75</sup> Within the mystical ritual Mass, the host became aniconic: Christ rather than a representation of Christ. Outside that ritual, miracle tales also treated images as being aniconic, or at the least as having the potential to become aniconic and react as persons rather than as images under certain circumstances, as, for example, when attacked by Jews.

To understand why, in medieval stories, Jews should attack Christian images, we must look first at the tradition of *imitatio Christi*. Just as the early martyrs emulated Christ's passion and death, so the Jews were thought to imitate the actions of the Jewish killers of Christ. Desecrations of images of Christ replayed aspects of the passion and crucifixion; for example, an image that was mistreated would bleed. Although resembling blood libel stories in depicting a violent Jewish act on a Christian body, albeit a representational rather than an actual body, these stories of image desecration seem to have predated blood libel stories.

The *Legenda*, for instance, contains no tales of Jewish ritual murder or host desecration. Narratives about Jewish host desecration emerge in the late thirteenth century,<sup>76</sup> too late for Jacobus. Tales of Jewish ritual murder did exist, especially in Britain, from the twelfth century on, but Jacobus does not include these in his work. This may have been because he sought to record saints' lives that had been set down by established chroniclers, or was concerned with saints who were universally known, rather than the perhaps more obscure saints created from ritual murder accusations,<sup>77</sup> or because he had not yet heard the stories, since they were relatively recent. Boureau comments that from 993 to 1255, eighty saints were canonised, of whom only five appear in the *Legenda*. This, Boureau feels, is indicative of a

<sup>74</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, p. 118.

<sup>75</sup> Barasch, describing the power of images, p. 64.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, pp.32-40; Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, p.114.

<sup>77</sup> Alain Boureau writes of 'le caractère universel et doctrinal' of the type of legendary Jacobus creates in the *Legenda Aurea*, distinguishing it from '[l]es recueils locaux ou régionaux'. *La Légende Dorée*, p. 11.

conservative mentality on Jacobus' part, and a greater interest in established than in new kinds of devotion; Boureau speaks of Jacobus' indifference to contemporary saints or saint worship. This may help explain why the recent phenomenon of ritual murder tales had not attracted Jacobus' attention.<sup>78</sup> In addition, the stories compiled by Jacobus cover the totality of Christian history up to his own day, and thus he re-tells many stories dating back long before his own day. It seems likely that most of his stories featuring Jews belong to earlier eras, before the blood libel accusations began. Since, although he does not include blood libel tales, Jacobus does record stories of Jews attacking images, this argues that such tales were well known before Jacobus' day.

Tales about Jews attacking Christian images can probably be best understood in the context of the Byzantine controversy between the iconoclasts and the iconodules, in which Jews played or were thought to have played a part.<sup>79</sup>

Trachtenberg writes:

Nearly all the medieval chroniclers in the West traced the origin of the Iconoclastic controversy in the time of the Isaurian emperors to the deep-rooted hatred of the Jews for the founders of Christianity and for the Virgin Mary in particular. The Jews were held responsible for the attacks upon images during this episode, and the Iconodules, who defended the use of images, created a series of stories recounting how the Jews were converted by the power of the very images they despised and sought to destroy.<sup>80</sup>

At the time of Leo III's banning of icons, Christians perceived Jews as objecting to the Christian use of images. In the eighth century, the patriarch of Constantinople claimed that 'the Jews frequently reproach us in this matter',<sup>81</sup> and the eighth-century *Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew*<sup>82</sup> purports to record Jewish objection

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<sup>78</sup> *La Légende Dorée*, p. 39. He also states that 'il est vrai que Jaques de Voragine est peu ouvert à la nouveauté spirituelle', adding that Jacobus does not speak about the mystery of the Eucharist, a topic that was occupying the thirteenth century. Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>79</sup> Describing tales of Jewish icon desecration found in late medieval manuscripts, Camille notes 'many of these stories are Byzantine in origin, arising from the iconoclastic controversy' (*The Gothic Idol*, p. 378, n. 38).

<sup>80</sup> *The Devil and the Jews*, p. 120.

<sup>81</sup> Andrew Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 70.

<sup>82</sup> Sergius the Stylite, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite Against a Jew*, trans. by A. P. Hayman, CSCO 339, Scriptorum Syri 153 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1973).

to the worship of the cross, of relics and of icons in the Christian church.<sup>83</sup> Defences of icons against the Jews had appeared in Christian polemics before this time as well. In Bishop Leontius' polemic of c. 625-68, a Jew and a Christian dispute over images, and the Christian says:

no sooner do you see me adore the icon of Christ or of His Immaculate Mother [...] than you flare up. [...] How many shadow-appearances and miracles of gushing have taken place, how many times has blood flown from the icons and the martyrs' relics! Yet these witless fellows [Jews], rather than being converted by such sights, held them to be imaginary and foolish.<sup>84</sup>

In this short passage we see juxtaposed the idea of the miraculous effluvia of icons and the conversionary purpose of such miracles, with the idea of Jews 'flaring up' at the Christian adoration of icons. Tales of literal Jewish attacks on icons concretised perceived Jewish polemical attacks, and combined the idea of the spiritual aliveness of icons with the perception of Jews as deicides and murderers. In 592, Jews were attacked and subsequently temporarily expelled from Antioch over an incident of the supposed desecration of an icon of the Virgin Mary.<sup>85</sup> Jews could also be involved, along with Christians, in actual attacks on icons, as happened during an uprising in 641 against the patriarch Pyrrhus in which rioters broke into Santa Sophia and defaced icons, amongst other destructive activities.<sup>86</sup> However, this kind of event does not resemble the ritualised 'deicidal' attack on icons carried out by Jews in miracle tales. Andrew Sharf sees Byzantine tales of Jews interacting with icons emerging out of Christian polemics that criticized Jewish objections to Christian icons, with the intent to persuade Christians not to be swayed by Jewish arguments:

The same intention inspired another approach: tales of how it happened that the icon itself miraculously converted the Jew to Christianity. The icon that

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 30-52. For an account of late medieval Jewish iconoclasm, cf. Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). For a discussion of Christian polemics against supposed pagan and Jewish arguments against Christian icons, cf. Norman Baynes, *Byzantine Essays and Other Studies* (London: Athlone, 1960), pp. 226-39, first published as 'The Icons Before Iconoclasm', *Harvard Theological Review*, 44 (1951), 93-106.

<sup>84</sup> Starr, p. 83, translating Leontius, bishop of Neapolis, *Polemic against the Jews*, PG XCIII, 1597-1609. Cf. also discussion in Baynes, pp. 230-7.

<sup>85</sup> Sharf, p. 45.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

stood surety for a debt was one example, and there was a host of others. The iconodules hoped that they would be particularly convincing precisely for Christians, since they fitted into a Christian tradition of the icons' miraculous powers established long before their place had been called into question.<sup>87</sup>

The tale of the Jew throwing a crucifix down a well and its miracle of blood recorded by Jacobus in the *Legenda Aurea* is set in Constantinople,<sup>88</sup> which may denote a Byzantine provenance for the tale.

If indeed the icon-desecration tales emerged, or at any rate flourished, in Byzantium, where the controversy over icons involved differences between Christian factions, a parallel with the emergence of the much later host-desecration narrative, emerging in the thirteenth century, can be seen.<sup>89</sup> At that time, Jews were perceived as attacking the Eucharist in their polemics. This perception was justified, since Jewish polemics of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries objected to the Eucharist, finding the idea of transubstantiation both repellent and improbable, and produced logical arguments the mechanics of the transformation.<sup>90</sup> Again the Christian complaint was made that the Jews 'mock and reproach' Christian practice.<sup>91</sup> As with icons, Christian attention focussed on such Jewish polemic at a time when Christian positions on the issue were in flux. In each case, stories emerged in which Jewish polemic was re-inscribed as literal attack on Christian symbols. Since the symbols attacked were treated by Christians as taking on the nature of the holy body, Jews in the tales were portrayed as attacking Christ's body, or the bodies of Mary or the saints, in a re-enactment of their deicidal hostility. The early stories of Jews attacking icons may have been the first instances of the creation of such myths. Tales of the desecration of images by Jews such as those cited by Jacobus may have been the precursors of more violent late-medieval tales of Jewish ritual murder of Christian

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 71. The tale of the icon that stood surety for a debt does not feature Jewish attack on an icon; the icon provides surety for a loan granted to a Christian, whereupon the Jewish moneylender converts. Cf. Sharf, p. 55.

<sup>88</sup> *GL* II, p. 170; *LA*, p. 608.

<sup>89</sup> This accusation and the various tales surrounding it have been thoroughly documented by Rubin in *Gentile Tales*.

<sup>90</sup> *Gentile Tales*, pp. 93-103.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 100, citing *Qui captum*, an anonymous thirteenth-century anti-Jewish polemic from Navarre: J. M. Millás Vallicrosa, 'Un tratado anónimo de polémica contra los Judíos', *Sefarad* 13 (1953), 3-34.

children, known as the blood libel accusation, as well of Jewish desecration of the Eucharist.

The foregoing discussion may give the impression that, where Jews interact with Christian images in miracle tales, they feature predominantly as attackers. However, despite the existence of tales in the *Legenda* and elsewhere in which Jews are hostile towards Christian images, the hostile paradigm is not the only possibility. Some tales depict an unusual relationship between Jews and the most characteristic Christian image, that of the cross. Where crucifixes, crosses and the making of the sign of the cross appear in the tales, the suggestion is that, like relics and images, the cross is a repository of power and a site for miraculous occurrences. The True Cross, on which Christ was crucified, is associated with miracles and with Jews in the *Legenda Aurea*. In the legend of the 'Finding of the Holy Cross', the True Cross is 'miraculously' unearthed in the fourth century because of special Jewish knowledge of its whereabouts.<sup>92</sup> In another short tale from the *Legenda Aurea*, an unconverted Jew uses the sign of the cross as a protection against demons, and is subsequently converted.<sup>93</sup> Since they were the people to whom Christ preached in the beginning and from whom he drew his disciples, Jews, even where portrayed as 'stubborn' and unbelieving, are also very often shown in the tales as being drawn to Christianity in ways that suggest that, deep down, they know or suspect that it is all true. This suggests the medieval belief, based on interpretations of St Paul, that Pauline Jews, although temporarily recalcitrant, were eventually destined to return to the fold and convert to Christianity.

Jewish conversion to Christianity is a key element of miracle tales involving Jews, whether in 'hostile' or in 'benign' mode. Conversion was linked to ideas about the miraculous. Anselm of Canterbury said that the conversion of an evil will towards a better impulse constitutes a miracle in itself, suggesting that this kind of conversion, at least, is a transformative mystery like baptism or communion.<sup>94</sup> If

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<sup>92</sup> *GL* I, pp. 277-84; *LA*, pp. 303-11.

<sup>93</sup> *GL* II, pp. 172-3; *LA*, pp. 609-11.

<sup>94</sup> Anselm gives examples of things accomplished through God's will alone, and not by created nature, in *De Conceptu virginali*, Chapter 11, citing as miracles the sea parting, water being changed into wine, the dead rising, and the conversion of evil wills from evil to good, by the grace of God. Anselm of Canterbury, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises*, trans. by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, (Minneapolis: Banning, 2000) p. 444, cited in Ward, p. 5.



conversions could be thought of as a kind of 'interior' miracle,<sup>95</sup> they could also be brought about by 'exterior' miracles: Ward cites Boniface accomplishing conversions to Christianity in the eighth century by means of 'sound doctrine and miracles'.<sup>96</sup> Since miracles were thought to have this power to convert, many narratives, including the miracle tales of the *Legenda*, related the sequence of miracle followed by conversion. In the miracle tales we shall discuss, the miracles involving images or crosses convert the Jews who witness them. Typically, the miracle thus leads to a restoration of order both on the earthly and the divine planes, and the tale ends with the neutralisation of the Jewish threat.

Tales in which Jews convert readily and permanently stand in contrast to the actual situation in medieval Europe, in which conversions were often forced, frequently resisted, and not always permanent.<sup>97</sup> A Byzantine example of a contrast between what appears to be a mythicised account of conversion with perhaps more historically accurate versions occurred during the reign of Romanus I (919-44), when an imperial attempt at widespread Jewish conversion generated a Latin account relating voluntary Jewish conversion as a result of miracles:

The emperor did, indeed, order all the Jews to be baptized, but when the Hebrews heard of God's miracles, they voluntarily believed and were baptized. (*Quod vero ipse imperator [...] omnes Iudeos baptizari iussit, et ipsi Hebrei mirabilia Dei audientes spontanea voluntate crediderunt et baptizati sunt.*)<sup>98</sup>

Arabic and Jewish sources, however, relate a mass exodus as a result of the conversion attempt.<sup>99</sup> In the tales, the conversion of the Jews usually brings about the desired resolution, although in versions of some tales, as in Chaucer's 'Prioress', the Jews do not convert and are put to death. Historically, Jews were frequently given the choice between conversion and death, but in some cases, having accepted baptism, they were then killed: in Passau in 1478, after a host desecration allegation,

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<sup>95</sup> Ward, p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 21, and cf. also ibid. p. 30.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. for example Stacey, 'The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England'.

<sup>98</sup> Starr, p. 151, translating Doge Peter II Candianus and Patriarch Marinus to Henry I of Germany, c. 930. *MGH: Legum Sectio*, IV, ed. L. Weiland (Hanover, 1893), p. 7; cf. also Starr, p. 7.

<sup>99</sup> Starr, p. 7, pp. 151-2.

Jews who accepted baptism were allowed to die by decapitation as an alternative to being tortured with hot pincers and subsequently burnt to death.<sup>100</sup>

While it is obvious that miracle tales need not reflect social realities with accuracy, there is significance in the areas of difference between historical instances of Jewish conversion and the miracle tales' treatment of the subject. Although miracle tales create space for non-Christian characters and may even give a voice to dissenting religious opinions, the miracle typically results in the silencing of such opinions, and a transformation from non-Christian to Christian identity of unbelievers through conversion. Although the conversion may leave traces of a 'spectral' Jewish identity, to use Steven Kruger's term,<sup>101</sup> nonetheless it provides a formalised narrative resolution, which typically transforms all the tale's characters into believing Christians. This contrasts significantly with the often difficult and chaotic attempts to convert Jews within Christendom, which could involve such phenomena as mob violence, inquisitorial trials, expulsions, imperfect or failed conversions and the continued spectre of Jewish identity that continued to haunt converts and their descendants.<sup>102</sup> It should be noted that early and medieval Christian literature on the subject of Jewish conversion is often supposed not to have actual Jewish conversion as its object, but rather to use the theme as a means of reaching a Christian audience.<sup>103</sup> The didactic aim is the reform or 'ethical conversion' of Christian hearers.<sup>104</sup> Such ethical conversions can be played out within the tale, as in the tale of the Jew who vanquishes some demons who have been tempting a bishop into sin; at the story's close, the Jew converts and the bishop is reformed.<sup>105</sup>

The miracles depicted in the *Legenda* and elsewhere, in bringing about Jewish conversion within the story, are thus performing a number of potential functions. These include bringing about a narrative resolution to existing religious

<sup>100</sup> Cited in Hsia, p. 51.

<sup>101</sup> Steven F. Kruger, 'The Spectral Jew', in *New Medieval Literatures II*, ed. by Rita Copeland et al. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), pp. 9-35, esp. pp. 29-32.

<sup>102</sup> St Bernard wrote of the antipope Peter Leonis, son of a converted Jew: '[...] it is to the injury of Christ that a man of Jewish race has seized for himself the See of Peter' ('[*Ut enim*] constat Judaicam sobolem sedem Petri in Christi occupasse injuriam'). Letter 142.1, *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 210; Latin, Letter 139.1, 'Epistolae', *PL* 182 (Paris: Migne, 1879), cols 67-716 (col. 294).

<sup>103</sup> For example, cf. Stacey, pp. 263-4.

<sup>104</sup> For the term 'ethical conversion' I am indebted to Richard Wood.

<sup>105</sup> *GL* II, pp. 172-3; *LA*, pp. 609-11.

and social tensions between Christians and Jews, and urging the ethical conversion of the audience by following the example of the transformed Jew in the story. Jewish witnessing and Jewish enabling of Christian miracles are mechanisms through which difference is resolved, and Christian ideals of faith and behaviour re-instated. Order is restored both through containment of the Jewish threat and through reference to the Jewish origins of Christianity. The protean character of the 'hermeneutical' Jew is used to create a mythic space in which these boundaries can be explored, tested and affirmed through the medium of story. Some of the stories that medieval Christians heard and told about Jews and miracles are the subject of the following chapters.

## Chapter Three: The Hostile Jew

The idea of the Jew as a hostile figure, responsible for the death of Christ and for continued injury to the Christian community, was built into the ideological and physical structures of medieval Christianity. This is demonstrated by Jacobus, in his chapter 'The Dedication of a Church'.<sup>1</sup> According to Jacobus, the construction of a church, its consecration and its use, all revolve around remembering Christ and the Crucifixion. Images of the Passion, preaching, and the sacrament of the Eucharist are directed respectively at the eye, ear and sense of taste to awaken memory and devotion. The canonical hours at which prayers are offered in the church recall moments in the life of Christ, and the image of the hostile Jew is among those evoked in the process of worship. For example, '[a]t midnight, when matins are celebrated, Christ was born, taken captive and mocked by the Jews'. ('[*Nam*] in nocte media, qua matutinae celebrantur, Christus natus est, captus et illusus a Judaeis fuit').<sup>2</sup> Similarly, '[a]t the third hour Christ was crucified by the tongues of the Jews.' ('In hora tertia Christus linguis Judaeorum crucifixus est.').<sup>3</sup> As for the accoutrements of the church, the water sprinkled at the altar recalls Christ's blood shed at the Passion, the alphabet written within a cross on the church floor represents the mingling of Jews and pagans in the Christian faith, the crosses in the church protect against profanation, for example from demons, and it is shown that usury and gluttony, which is likened to idolatry, profane the church as well, and that no church can be built if tainted with such sins.<sup>4</sup> Association with demons, usury, gluttony and idolatrous worship are qualities stereotypically linked with Jews by medieval Christianity. Jacobus thus shows that the structure of the church and the patterns of worship to be carried out within that structure contain mnemonic resonances, whereby the Crucifixion and the role of the Jews in bringing it about, the submission of Jews and pagans to Christianity and the undesirability of qualities associated with Jews, are recalled to all who enter.

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<sup>1</sup> *GL* II, pp. 385-95; *LA*, pp. 845-857.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387; *ibid.*, p. 848.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388; *ibid.*

In tales compiled by Jacobus for the *Legenda*, Jewish hostility is portrayed as being directed towards Christian religious symbols or pictures, often those that depict Christ's body or the Crucifixion, as well as towards the body of the Virgin near the time of her assumption. In the chapter entitled 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross',<sup>5</sup> Jacobus relates two short tales in which Jews attack Christian images (as well as a third tale concerning a benign Jew, to be discussed in Chapter Four). In the 'Exaltation' chapter, Jacobus uses stories about Jews, amongst other types of narrative, to construct an argument about the power of the Christian cross. In doing so, he suggests that all representations of the cross have special powers, and that one of the ways these powers can manifest is by the agency of Jews.

Jacobus begins 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross' by extolling the virtues of the 'true' cross, on which Christ was crucified. Following this is the principle narrative, which concerns the adventures that befall a fragment of the true cross in Persia. Although this legend does not concern Jews, the tales about Jews follow this first segment directly, and a connection between these sections, not immediately obvious, needs to be elucidated. Many of the themes of this first narrative are of importance in understanding Jacobus' purpose in telling stories about interactions between Jews and the cross or other religious images. The story about the true cross continues the themes of another chapter in the *Legenda*, 'The Finding of the Holy Cross',<sup>6</sup> which recounts the history of the true cross and its discovery by Helena, the mother of the fourth-century Roman emperor Constantine, with the aid of Jews. 'The Finding of the Holy Cross' will be discussed in the following chapter, but it is enough to say here that it constructs myths about the Christianisation of Rome, using the true cross to give Christian validation to events during the reign of the Emperor Constantine.

As the story of the true cross is picked up in 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross', Chosroës, a pagan king of Persia, steals a piece of the cross and attempts to set himself up as a god. He lives in a tower made of jewels and precious metals, adorned with images of celestial bodies, and creates machinery to imitate the natural processes of rain and thunder. Chosroës sits on a throne 'as the Father', with 'the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp. 389-93; *ibid.*, pp. 850-4.

<sup>5</sup> *GL* II, pp. 168-73; *LA*, pp. 605-11.

<sup>6</sup> *GL* I, pp. 277-84; *LA*, pp. 303-11.

wood of the true cross on his right in place of the Son, and a cock on his left in place of the Holy Spirit.' ('*Cosdroe in throno residens tanquam pater lignum crucis sibi a dextris imposuit loco filii et gallum a sinistris loco spiritus sancti.*')<sup>7</sup> His reign ends when he is attacked, defeated and killed by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (c.574-641, emperor 610-641), who acknowledges the authority of the Christian God. Heraclius restores the stolen fragment to Jerusalem. On the outskirts of the city, prompted by the appearance of an angel, the emperor humbles himself in an act of *imitatio Christi*, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey instead of marching in as a triumphant hero. The cross emits a sweet fragrance as Heraclius praises it in rapturous language. Following this the cross begins to generate healing miracles, referred to as the 'miracles of old' ('*antiqua miracula*'), suggesting this function has been interrupted by the theft.<sup>8</sup>

Jacobus here appends a shorter version of the story of this Byzantine-Persian conflict, stripped of much of its mythic detail, recounting how the Persian king occupies Jerusalem, where the true cross is kept, and refuses to make peace with the Byzantines unless they renounce Christianity. Fighting breaks out and the Persian king is deposed in an intrigue involving his two sons, the elder of whom has him killed, whereupon, as in the longer version, the cross becomes the property of Heraclius, who takes it to Jerusalem and then to Constantinople.<sup>9</sup>

In the longer narrative, much attention is paid to establishing how the pagan king calls himself the Father, as if attempting to usurp the role of the Christian God, and, in an act comparable to the building of the tower of Babel, tries to construct a false heavenly city with the aid of artifice. By contrast, the Byzantine emperor humbles himself to ride into Jerusalem on an ass in imitation of Christ. Here the spiritual credentials of the Christian leader are on display: while his opponent has attempted to displace God, the Byzantine submits to the will of God and imitates Christ in humility. The narrative constructs a hierarchy in which spiritual authority is set above temporal authority: the angel commands the emperor. Yet the true cross is used to authorise a temporal kingdom, which assumes power on the understanding that it is representative also of the spiritual kingdom. This is underlined by the nature

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<sup>7</sup> *GL* I, p. 169; *LA*, p. 606.

<sup>8</sup> *GL* II, pp. 168-70; *LA*, pp. 605-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170; *ibid.*, pp. 607-8.



of the miracles associated with the cross: the sweet fragrance it emits and its healing powers.

For the Christian writers of the tales, these would serve as clear signs that the power of the cross emanated from the Christian God, who was also the source of the divine authority which supported the conquest of pagan states by Christian Rome. This tale, like the legend of Helena's discovery of the cross in 'The Finding of the Holy Cross', uses the cross or its fragments in narratives whose themes relate to temporal and spiritual politics, to the establishment of religious or national entities and to physical place. Rome, Jerusalem, Constantinople, their temporal power and spiritual significance, are emphasised in these legends. The true cross, having played its part in the making of history, whether in a Christian-mythic or a literal sense, is used in these narratives as a catalyst for the making of further history. The issues involved are weighty ones of territory, control, nationhood and power.

At this juncture Jacobus shifts the tone of the chapter, following the legend of the true cross with three short anecdotes involving Jews. Of these, the first two are about the Jewish desecration of Christian images. The first concerns an image of Christ (whether crucified or not is not specified, although the context suggests that this is intended inference), while the second specifies an image of Christ crucified. The third tale does not present a hostile Jewish character and will be discussed in Chapter Four.

In the first of the tales, a Jew goes into the church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople and stabs an image of Christ with a sword. The image spatters blood onto the Jew, who throws the image into a well and runs away. When accused of murder by a Christian who sees the blood, the Jew replies

Truly the God of the Christians is great, and everything confirms faith in him. I have not stabbed a man but an image of Christ, and straightaway the blood gushed out from his throat! (*'vere Deus christianorum magnus est et fides ejus firma per omnia comprobatur; [nequaquam enim] hominem percussi, sed Christi imaginem, et continuo sanguis emanavit de ejus gutture.'*)<sup>10</sup>

The image is retrieved from the well and continues to bear the mark of the attack, and the Jew converts.

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<sup>10</sup> GL II, p. 171; LA, p. 608.

In placing this tale in the 'Exaltation' chapter, directly following the tale about the true cross, Jacobus makes a narrative leap. The tale of the true cross deals with concepts of the earthly and heavenly cities and temporal and spiritual modes of kingship, and the healing miracles of the cross both demonstrate the new dispensation of Christ and associate this with the Roman Empire. By contrast, the image of Christ in the subsequent narrative about the Jew is not associated with a battle between conflicting national or religious groups, and while it is the source of one miracle, this is not a miracle of healing, nor does it exert a wide influence. The location where the events are set, Constantinople, is mentioned, and this city is associated with legends of the true cross.<sup>11</sup> However, the place makes no difference to the tale itself, and issues of territorial dispute, nationhood, the establishment of religious and political institutions are not directly involved. Instead, this is a small, localised miracle that results in the conversion of one Jew. This raises questions as to what purpose Jacobus may have had in his juxtaposition of these segments of his narrative.

In each of his chapters, Jacobus takes as his theme the sanctity of a religious figure, usually a saint or member of the Holy Family, or of the Holy Cross. After giving an etymology of the saint's name, he goes on to relate the history of the saint, or, as in this case, the holy object. Finally, Jacobus appends homilies or anecdotes relating to his theme. In the case of a saint this will often involve a relation of posthumous miracles. These anecdotes underline the message that the saint's holy life has been such as to give rise to miracles, which 'prove' his or her sanctity beyond question. The internal ordering of Jacobus' chapters is generally fairly coherent, so that the placing of anecdotes about Jews attacking religious images in a chapter about the true cross suggests that the stories are used by Jacobus in furtherance of his theme in the chapter, that is, the sanctity and power attaching to the Cross.

In order to understand how an attack on an image by a Jew could be related to a history of Christ's cross, we need to understand how the cross and the image might be related. The transition from the tale of the true cross to the tale of the Jew involves a conceptual shift regarding different kinds of miraculous power. In the tale of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

true cross, Jacobus is telling a story about the virtues of the actual cross on which Christ was crucified; in the tale of the Jew, he is speaking about powers attaching to *images* of Christ or of the crucifixion. Jacobus does not mark this change in focus with any commentary. It is left to the reader to make the connection between the powers and virtues belonging to actual relics of Christ and those belonging to images made by ordinary humans. The true cross is a physical relic touched by Christ, pivotally and intimately involved in his history, while images of Christ have no direct historical or physical link with him. We might tend to consider images and icons as being holy symbols, rather than holy relics.

However, his placement of this tale argues that Jacobus thinks of holy symbols as sources of the kinds of phenomena he has associated with the true cross. If we think of this chapter of the *Legenda* as having as its broad theme ‘the power of the cross’, we can see that the tales he cites give a range of ways in which this power can manifest. As he uses it, the concept of ‘the cross’ covers a broad variety of phenomena, including the true cross on which Christ was crucified, fragments of this cross, crosses used in Christian worship, images that include the cross, and even (in a further tale in the chapter) the act of making the sign of the cross. J. A. MacCulloch describes this conflation of ideas as existing in Christian literature from an early period:

Many passages in the Apocryphal Acts and other documents show that the Gnostics as well as many in orthodox circles regarded the Cross, whether the actual Cross or a phantasmal, mystic Cross, as Christ Himself or as his equivalent [...]

This view of Christ and His Cross as doubles may have influenced Christian art, in which the Cross is Christ or His symbol [...] <sup>12</sup>

MacCulloch here describes three important areas of transference regarding the idea of the Cross in early Christian literature and art, which we can see as continuing into the medieval period. One is that the True Cross and a ‘phantasmal’ ideational Cross can be conflated. Another is that the Cross may be conflated with Christ Himself. The third is that Christian art may use the Cross as a symbol of Christ. The third point relates to symbolism only, rather than to an actual conflation. However, as

discussed in Chapter Two, religious images and symbols like statues, pictures and crosses, albeit in an unauthorised way that mirrored the authorised doctrine of transubstantiation as it occurred in the Eucharist, could be treated in narrative and popular devotional practice as ‘doubles’ of Christ to a lesser or greater degree. In the context of these ideas we can see that Jacobus is describing the image of Christ in the tale about the Jew as being related to the Cross, and also that he is treating both Cross and image as participating in the divine nature of Christ Himself.

We must now consider the significance of the role of the Jewish character and the attack on the image of Christ. In the foregoing tale, the manifestation of the icon takes the form of a shower of blood, evoking the scourging and passion of Christ. Here we see the significance of the Jewish identity of the desecrator of the icon. Many of the physical assaults on Christ in the gospel narratives are carried out by Roman soldiers, yet in Christian medieval tales the shedding of Christ’s blood is very often associated with Jews.<sup>13</sup> Since Jews were held guilty of the crime of deicide, a common structure for legends of Jewish desecration of Christian icons, or of Jewish murder of Christians, is to have the assault recapitulate aspects of the crucifixion. A detailed example comes from the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, in which Jews stab the holy host with daggers and nail it to a post, after which they go further and attempt to boil it in a cauldron full of oil and finally cast it into a burning oven.<sup>14</sup> In the *Legenda*, the image of Christ that bleeds after an attack by a Jew and is cast into a well and then retrieved is an example of the religious icon taking on aspects of Christ’s passion (the resemblance between wells, cauldrons and pits to Christ’s tomb and the hellmouth will be discussed in connection with the tale of the ‘Jewish boy’ below). In displaying the miraculous property of being able to bleed, the image is displaying God’s power to contravene the ordinary laws of nature. But more than that, the specific characteristics of Christ that the image displays suggest that Christ in actuality and Christ imaged are to an extent conflated. In attacking the image, the

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<sup>12</sup> J. A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1930), p. 341.

<sup>13</sup> Sara Lipton writes: ‘By the thirteenth century it was established convention in Christian literature and art to identify the Romans involved in the Passion with the Jews, and therefore a combination of Roman-type tunics, Jewish hats, and scowling caricatures characterize the figures of the tormentors of Christ.’ *Images of Intolerance*, p. 159, n. 15.

<sup>14</sup> ‘The Play of the Sacrament’, esp. ll. 457-503, pp. 72-3, and ll. 661-716, pp. 78-80.

Jewish character can then be seen to be reprising the attack on Christ himself which constituted the deicidal sin of the Jews.

The tale thus has farther-reaching ramifications than it would appear. When the Jew attacks the image his action mimics and calls to mind the sin of all post-biblical Jews. Similarly his conversion is a reminder of the conversion of all Jews that Christians believed would occur before the Day of Judgement. The blood that spatters onto the Jew, leading the Christian onlooker to identify him as a murderer, recalls the passage from Matthew 27. 25 'His blood be upon us and our children.' Jews were thought by medieval Christians to suffer a bloody flux and related ailments as a result of their deicidal blood-guilt, and they were thought to seek Christian blood for its supposed cleansing properties. Thus, when the Christian identifies the blood-spattered Jew as a murderer, he is incorrect in a literal sense, as the Jew hastens to point out, but correct in a mythic sense, since the Jew is representative of the deicidal Jews of the biblical past. Jacobus uses this theme elsewhere in the *Legenda*, in a brief episode from 'The Beheading of St John the Baptist', when, as a sign of divine disapproval of Julian the Apostate restoring 'the temple of the Jews', fire and storms interrupt the building, and '[a]nother day the sign of the cross appeared in the sky, and the Jews' clothing was covered with black crosses' ('*Alia vero die signum crucis in coelo apparuit et Judaeorum vestes nigro colore crucis signaculo sunt impletae*').<sup>15</sup> This marking of the Jews brings to mind not only the bloody stigma thought to be suffered by the Jews, but also Augustine's equation of the Jews with Cain, discussed in Chapter One. In all of these treatments, as perhaps with the adoption of the medieval 'Jew badge',<sup>16</sup> Jews are seen as being physically marked with deicidal guilt.

The deicide motif can be related to Jacobus' theme of the power of the Cross. An example from the early Christian writers using the symbol of the cross to confound the deicidal Jews comes from Cyril of Jerusalem, writing of the Second Coming:

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<sup>15</sup> *GL* II, p. 137; *LA*, p. 571.

<sup>16</sup> On the 'Jew badge', cf. Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, 2 vols (New York: Hermon, 1966; Theological Seminary of America, 1989), I (1966), pp. 60-70 and pp. 308-9.

Now the true and authentic sign of Christ is the cross. The sign that precedes the King is a cross of light, announcing him who aforetime was crucified. So, when the Jews see it, who of old pierced him and conspired against him, let them 'mourn tribe by tribe' and say, 'This is he who was buffeted. This is he in whose face they spat. This is he whom they bound with chains. This is he whom they set at nought upon the cross.' [...] So the sign of the cross will be terror to our enemies, but joy to the friends who put their faith in him, preached him, or suffered for his name.<sup>17</sup>

This eloquent passage from Cyril contains many of the elements found in Jacobus' treatment of the cross and images of Christ, which both invite and overcome the deicidal propensities of the Jews. Cyril's eschatological hopes are in medieval narrative replaced by concerns with ethical conversion, recounting external dangers to the faith with the aim of encouraging internal reform by reinforcing the faith of Christians. The hostile and deicidal actions of Jewish characters furnish the plots of miracle tales with just such dangers, and their specific connection with the cross evoke affective response to Christ's passion whenever, in the tales, the cross and Christian icons are assaulted.

Yet, as we shall begin to see, the topos of the mythic, deicidal Jew whose unbelief manifests as hostility towards Christian icons only represents part of the story. In the tale we have looked at, for example, the Jew is depicted as being readily converted by the miracle, exclaiming, 'Truly the God of the Christians is great, and everything confirms faith in him'. The implication of the use of the word 'everything' seems to be that the Jew has previously been able to recognise other proofs of Christian faith as well as that provided by the miraculous occurrence. Furthermore, he is portrayed as immediately accepting this occurrence as a miracle, without attempting to find rational reasons for the manifestation of blood. Similarly he is not shown to hesitate in accepting that the manifestation, even if supernaturally caused, constitutes a confirmation of Christian faith rather than, say, being the work of sorcerers or demons, as was often argued in the early Christian and medieval periods between proponents of differing faiths.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the Jew's importance in the

<sup>17</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, 'The Catechetical Lectures', in *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemeseius of Emesa*, ed. by William Telfer, Library of Christian Classics 4 (London: SCM, 1955), pp. 19-199, 15.22, p. 163.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, for example, contrasts biblical miracles with pagan magic: 'These [Old Testament] miracles, and many others of the same kind [...] were performed in order to promote the worship of the one true God and to forbid the worship of the multitude of false gods. Moreover, they were performed through simple faith and pious trust, and not by means of incantations and charms



story seems to hinge upon his acceptance of Christianity, as much as upon his attack on it. The most vivid detail of the narrative, the shower of blood received by the Jew as he stabs the image of Christ, can also be read as a reference to the Jew's baptism into the new faith. The early martyrs were baptised in blood by dying for Christ, and here the Jew's 'death', that is, the death of his Jewish identity in conversion and his rebirth in Christ, is offered up. This offering resembles Christ's own self-sacrifice in that it replaces the Jewish, or Old Testament blood sacrifice. It is, of course, the shedding of Christ's blood (by Jews) that makes baptism into the Christian faith possible for this Jew, who is thus showered with blood as a dual signifier: initially marked with deicidal blood-guilt, but subsequently reborn through Christ's blood as a new Christian.

It seems possible that this story incorporates an element of early Christian accounts of the conversion of pagans into this tale of a Jewish attack on a Christian icon. Ramsay MacMullen cites a passage from a probably apocryphal *Life of Porphyry*, of which the Syriac original dates from the fifth or sixth century. Converted by Porphyry's successful prayers for rain, which the deity Nonos could not provide, the 'idolaters' cry out 'Great is the God of the Christians!' Macmullen comments, 'The episode is just such as Tertullian boasted of, down to the very words of exclamation; and they, in turn, are just such as non-Christians commonly did use to greet a miracle.'<sup>19</sup> MacMullen presumably means that this exclamation is commonly featured in early conversion narratives, which is the case: an example from the 'Acts of Theodore' relates that the noblemen sent to remove the fourth-century martyr Theodore's body from the cross find him miraculously healed and cry out 'Great is the God of the Christians, and there is none other God but He', whereupon the two nobles, along with eighty-two soldiers, convert.<sup>20</sup> It could be that the Jew of Jacobus' tale replaces the converting pagan of earlier narratives. It is tempting to speculate

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composed by the practitioners of the art of wicked curiosity: the art which they call either magic, or by the more detestable name of witchcraft, or by the more honourable one of theurgy' ('*Haec et alia multa hujuscemodi [...] fiebant ad commendandum unius Dei veri cultum, et multorum falsorumque prohibendum. Fiebant autem simplici fide atque fiducia pietatis, non incantationibus et carminibus nefariae curiositatis arte compositis, quam vel magiam, vel detestabiliore nomine goetiam, vel honorabiliore theurgiam vocant [...]'*). *City of God*, 10.9, pp. 403-4; *De civitate Dei* 10.9, PL 41, col. 286.

<sup>19</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, A.D. 100-400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 87. Macmullen cites Marc. Diac. *Vita Porphy.*, section 17.

that a narrative like this was composed by a medieval monk or friar who was familiar with patristic and other early source texts and thus reproduced earlier formulations. This would suggest that the ease of conversion attributed to the Jew in this story could relate to early Christian portrayals of non-Christian converts in general, rather than relating to supposed Jewish characteristics in particular.

Yet, echoes of Paul's 'to the Jew first' theology, and the idea that the Jews at all times had the potential, and were even destined, to convert, may be discerned in even such depictions of hostile and aggressive Jews. The paradox is evoked, yet not resolved, within the tale, since the position of the Jew vis-à-vis Christian belief is not fully elucidated. The question is left open as to whether the Jew is meant to be enraged at the sight of a Christian symbol, which could be explained as a result of religious antagonism, or whether he is portrayed as recognising the presence of Christ in the icon and hence being moved to re-create a deicidal assault.

In the 'Exaltation' chapter of the *Legenda*, a second tale about Jews that follows the one just discussed also describes a Jewish attack on a Christian image.<sup>21</sup> This is another short tale in which a Jew attacks a Christian image, this time one that specifically includes a depiction of the cross. The tale takes place in Beirut, where a Jew rents a house formerly occupied by a Christian, who has left behind a picture of the crucifixion. When the picture is discovered by a Jewish guest, members of the Jewish community visit the house and attack the tenant, who despite his protests of ignorance is thrown out of the house. They then 'trampled the picture and renewed upon it all the indignities of the Lord's passion' (*'imaginem vero conculcantes pedibus cuncta in ea dominicae passionis opprobria renovarunt'*).<sup>22</sup> They thrust a lance into the picture and blood and water flows out. The Jews take the blood to the synagogues and 'all the sick who were anointed with it were cured immediately' (*'omnes infirmi ex ipso inuncti protinus curabantur'*).<sup>23</sup> The Jews go to the bishop and relate the occurrence, and all of them convert and turn their synagogues into churches. The bishop asks the original owner about the history of the picture, and he explains:

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<sup>20</sup> *The Armenian Apology and Acts of Apollonius and other Monuments of Early Christianity*, ed. by F. C. Conybeare (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1896), p. 234.

<sup>21</sup> *GL* II, p. 171; *LA*, pp. 608-9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*; *ibid.*, p. 609.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Nicodemus painted it and at his death bequeathed it to Gamaliel; Gamaliel left it to Zacheus, Zacheus to James, and James to Simon. So it remained in Jerusalem till the fall of the city. Then the faithful took it into Agrippa's kingdom. From there it was brought into my country by my ancestors and came to me by right of inheritance. (*Nicodemus illam composuit, quam moriens Gamalieli, Gamaliel Zacheo, Zacheus Jacobo, Jacobus Symoni dereliquit, sicque in Jerusalem usque ad excidium urbis fuit, donec inde a fidelibus in regnum Agrippae delata et inde ad patriam meam deducta a parentibus meis ad me hereditario jure devenit.*)<sup>24</sup>

The narrative then gives the year – 750 – in which the events are supposed to have taken place, and relates that all the Jews consecrated their synagogues and turned them into churches. Jacobus concludes by saying that this is the origin of the custom of consecrating churches, and that, following this miracle, the Church instituted a commemoration of the Passion, though whether this is on 27 or 9 November he is unsure. He also notes that a phial of the miraculous blood is kept in Rome in a church specially consecrated in honour of the Saviour, and the feast is observed there.<sup>25</sup>

As with the preceding narrative, at first sight the story seems to be one of the actions of Jews who are utterly hostile to Christianity. In the tale, a group of Jews attacks a fellow-Jew merely for having a picture of the crucifixion in his rented house. They then attack the image with ferocity. The parallels with the crucifixion are given in greater detail than in the preceding narrative, and it is made clear that the 'indignities' inflicted on the picture mirror those which were suffered by Christ, including the thrusting of a lance into his side. The savagery of the attack as well as its mirroring of the crucifixion are typical of this genre of tales about hostile Jews, and Jewish deicidal guilt is clearly invoked. However, as with the previous tale, there are elements of the narrative that throw into question, if not the hostility of the Jews then certainly their unbelief. The act of 'trampling on' the iconography of another religion could be consistent with a picture of Jews and Christians engaged in inter-religious enmity, but the Jews are doing more than expressing enmity towards Christianity; they can be seen to be re-enacting elements of Christ's Passion.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> This tale, described as the 'Beirut' tale, is cited in other sources: cf. Nicholas Vincent, *The Holy Blood: King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p. 64, and Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 305.

Arguably the portrayal of Jews carrying out such an attack implies an assumption, not only that Jews are somehow drawn to repeat deicidal behaviour, but that they recognise Christ's presence in the image in order to do so.

At least to an extent, then, the effect is to conflate medieval Jews with the hostile Jews of the New Testament. The representation of biblical scenes using contemporary styles of architecture and dress is a familiar aspect of medieval art, and many such works include Jews in medieval dress in scenes depicting Christ's Passion.<sup>26</sup> This may be simply a device to make the past comprehensible to uneducated viewers, or it may reflect genuine historiographical confusion on the part of medieval artists. However, such anachronisms may also form a part of a typological philosophy of history in which symbology plays a greater part than ordinary chronology. One medieval Christian idea about Jews that was reflected in the plots of miracle tales was that, in refusing to accept the new dispensation of Christ, they had in a sense dropped out of the historical progression of man, and were like living fossils, static remnants of a pre-Christian past. Thus it could seem that there was no important difference between medieval Jews and the unbelieving Jews at the time of Christ. Jews could be perceived as being trapped in the essential moment of their undoing, doomed to be fascinated by and endlessly to repeat the events of the Passion and crucifixion, until such time as the truth was revealed to them and they converted to Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

Underlying this scenario is the theme of Jewish fascination with Christ and his Church. In order for the plots of miracle tales to unfold, Jewish characters had to

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Lipton's discussion of Jewish dress as imaged in the *Bible moralisée*, in *Images of Intolerance*, pp. 15-21. However, Lipton reads depictions of Jews in pointed hats as being not necessarily reflections of late-medieval Jewish dress (claiming that such hats were not invariably worn by Jews in the period nor confined to Jewish use), but rather as signifiers of particular concepts of Jewishness. Cf. also Heinz Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art: An Illustrated History*, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM, 1996), p. 22 and pp. 75-118.

<sup>27</sup> Lipton asks, regarding an image of the destruction of the Old Law by Christ in front of an audience of Jews, 'Do these figures represent those Jews who at the time of Jesus refused to abandon their ancient observances, or are they intended to represent medieval Jews? Do the scrolls signify an interpretation of Scripture rooted in the past, or an ongoing repetition of the original denial of Christ?' (*Images of Intolerance*, p. 62). She concludes that elements of both are represented in the *Bible moralisée*, and that the Old Law is depicted as still being dangerous in the hands of contemporary Jews (p. 66). Cf. also Lipton's discussion (pp. 57-61 and ff.) of whether Jews were being depicted in medieval art as static and antique in their adherence to the Old Law, following Augustinian doctrine, or as changing and requiring new attitudes towards them, as argued by Cohen in *The Friars and the Jews*. Lipton comments, 'The *Bible moralisée* is ambiguous [...] many texts clearly censure Jews for

be motivated to carry out repetitions of the Passion and Crucifixion. Their motivations tend not to be elucidated in the texts, and again it is left to the reader to accept or to ponder the underlying assumptions. While New Testament and Patristic accounts portrayed Jewish treatment of Christ as a result of unbelief, myths of hostility attributed to medieval Jews could be thought of as being motivated as much by a certain furtive Christian belief, as by total unbelief. Certain elements in the foregoing tale may bear this out. After the miraculous flow of blood and water, the Jews take the fluid to their synagogues and begin to use it to treat the sick. One implication is that the Jews are meant instantly to have recognised the potential healing qualities of the fluid, arguing for some prior belief. As in the other tale, the Jews are not shown as considering any but Christian religious causes (e.g., rational explanation or demonic provenance) for the miraculous occurrence.

Alternatively, the implication may be that power of the miracle is such as to impress upon the darkened minds of the Jews not only the presence of God in the icon, but also the nature of his mercy as demonstrated by the curative powers of the mysterious blood. Thus enlightened, the Jews proceed to make use of the healing substance. According to this reading, contemporary or post-biblical miracles are so powerful as to effect what the actual events of the Crucifixion and Resurrection did not, that is instantly to convert witnesses to belief in Christ and an understanding of the nature of the Christian God.

Rather than choosing between alternative readings of the tales under discussion, whereby we understand the Jewish characters either as exhibiting signs of prior belief, or as initially hostile and subsequently converted by miracle, it might be more helpful to look at the tales as being structured around a tension between these alternatives. In the foregoing tale, for example, the acts of the Jews in using the miraculous blood to heal the sick, in confiding in the bishop and in converting all their synagogues to churches, could all be thought of as resulting from instant conversion and not as stemming from any prior willingness to believe. However, as the tale continues and the bishop obtains from the Christian owner of the image an account of its provenance, emphasis is placed on the construct of the believing and supportive Jew.

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excessive literalism only, but others indicate that a new hostility was at least partly directed toward



This occurs when the history of the image is recounted in the form of a series of names: 'Nicodemus painted it and at his death bequeathed it to Gamaliel; Gamaliel left it to Zacheus, Zacheus to James, and James to Simon'.<sup>28</sup> The first three characters on the list are mentioned in the New Testament: there are too many Jameses and Simons to be sure of an accurate identification of the latter two. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, appears in the Gospel of John, arguing with the other Pharisees against the proposed arrest of Christ, asking, 'Doth our law judge any man, unless it first hear him, and know what he doth?' (John 7. 51.) He appears in John 19:39, bringing myrrh and aloes for the burial after the death of Christ; as we shall see below, in the Grail legends and in a treatise of Robert Grosseteste, his presence at the Crucifixion and burial give him a connection with the actual blood of Christ. Nicodemus also figures in New Testament apocrypha: in the Gospel of Nicodemus, or Acts of Pilate, he plays a supportive role similar to that in John 7. 50-51.<sup>29</sup> Gamaliel appears in Acts 5. 34-9, counselling the Pharisees not to hinder the apostles, because 'if this council or this work be of men, it will come to nought; [b]ut if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it, lest perhaps you be found even to fight against God.' (Acts 5. 38-9). A fragmentary account of a 'Gamaliel' present at Christ's burial also exists.<sup>30</sup> Zacheus is the publican of Luke 19. 1-10 who, after receiving Christ as a guest, promises to give half his goods to the poor, and to restore any falsely obtained sum fourfold, whereupon Christ says of him, 'This day is salvation come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham.' (Luke 19. 9).

The chronology according to which the picture is handed down does not make sense, since the characters are roughly contemporary: Nicodemus and Zacheus are represented in the New Testament as participating in events during the lifetime of Christ, and Gamaliel shortly after his death. However, what is significant for the purposes of the narrative is that the picture is seen to have been created and preserved by Jews who were witnesses to Christ's life and death, and supporters of his cause and of his apostles. The line of descent even raises the possibility that the

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contemporary Jewish practice and/or rabbinic literature' (p. 61).

<sup>28</sup> *GL* II, p. 171.

<sup>29</sup> For a translation of 'The Gospel of Nicodemus, or Acts of Pilate', cf. *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, ed. by J. K. Elliot (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), pp. 164-204.

<sup>30</sup> 'The Gospel of Gamaliel', in *ibid.*, pp. 159-60.



Christian owner of the picture may be ancestrally Jewish, since from 'Agrippa's kingdom' or Palestine, the picture is brought to Syria by the owner's ancestors, and in his words 'came to me by right of inheritance'.<sup>31</sup> Whether or not this is the case, the image which has been attacked by hostile Jews is also seen to have been preserved by helpful Jews.

The insistence on the image's provenance recalls the 'Jewish witness' doctrine of Augustine and others, discussed in Chapter One, which holds that the function of the Jews in Christendom is to bear witness to the origins and truth of Christianity. This is partly because of their continued use of the Jewish scriptures thought to foretell the coming of Christ, and partly, following Pauline doctrine, because the Jews were the people originally chosen: 'the words of God were committed to them' (Romans 3. 2). Jewish witness to the provenance of the picture in the tale helps validate the miraculous issue of blood and the subsequent healing miracles, as well as the 'phial of blood' preserved as a relic thereafter.

The supposed role of the Jews in bringing about miracles that result in relics is perhaps more central to medieval Christian devotional practices than is commonly acknowledged. 'Miraculous' blood and Eucharistic relics could be venerated as much as any supposed 'actual' relic of Christ himself. To understand how both relics of Christ and miraculous relics were seen, and what was the role of the Jews in authenticating both kinds of relics and in producing the latter, we can refer to the useful work on blood relics done by Nicholas Vincent.<sup>32</sup> As Vincent says, since Christ was understood to have been assumed into heaven in bodily form, there existed less possibility of remnants of his body surviving to be used as relics, but his nails, hair, milk teeth,<sup>33</sup> foreskin<sup>34</sup> and blood collected from his body before its disappearance<sup>35</sup> were all at times thought to have provided material for relics. However, such 'relics' were scarce and disputed.<sup>36</sup> Vincent cites a treatise supporting the Westminster relic, which was a supposed portion of the blood of Christ, by

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<sup>31</sup> *GL* II, p. 171.

<sup>32</sup> Vincent gives a detailed treatment of the scholastic debate as to the authenticity of relics of Christ's blood in *The Holy Blood*, pp. 82-136.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62 and 85.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40 ff.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4 and 82-6.

Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln from 1235-1253.<sup>37</sup> Grosseteste gives a provenance for the Westminster blood which is similar to the provenance of the crucifixion picture in the *Legenda*.

In creating a history for the relic, Grosseteste refers to the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, which describes how Joseph of Arimathea wraps the body of Christ in linen and entombs it in the cave. Grosseteste elaborates on this story, describing Joseph, with Nicodemus as his assistant, collecting Christ's blood. This detail may have been inspired by contemporary Grail legends, in which Joseph collects Christ's blood in the Grail, or chalice used at the Last Supper.<sup>38</sup> Like the picture in the 'Beirut' tale, the blood is then handed down by generations of Jews:

He [Grosseteste] then goes on to explain that the liquids collected from Christ's body were passed down from father to son, Joseph, Nicodemus and their descendants being amongst the leading noblemen in Judea. Thereafter [...] Grosseteste recounts the relic's dispatch from Jerusalem in 1247.<sup>39</sup>

Grosseteste and Jacobus may have had access to analogous source narratives which included this kind of provenance for blood relics. Belting comments regarding versions of Jacobus' source legend, the 'Beirut' tale, that the Nicodemus motif is introduced in a Latin version, and that 'Nicodemus guaranteed [the image's] status as an original'.<sup>40</sup> In a similar narrative pattern in the *Legenda*, the genealogy of the true cross is recounted in 'The Finding of the Holy Cross'.<sup>41</sup>

The similarities between Grosseteste's narrative regarding the Westminster blood relic and the Grail Legend recall the idea popularised in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*,<sup>42</sup> and in Michael Baigent's *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*,<sup>43</sup> of a connection between the Grail and genealogy. The idea has been treated by these authors, whether or not in fictional terms, as having to do with literal blood descendents of Christ, a subject that does not easily lend itself to academic analysis. If, however, one is less literal and looks at the Grail, blood and genealogy as themes

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 87 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-91.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 88-9.

<sup>40</sup> *Likeness and Presence*, p. 305.

<sup>41</sup> *GL* I, pp. 277-8; *LA*, pp. 303-5.

<sup>42</sup> Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (London: Arrow, 1996).

in early and medieval Christian narratives, a connection does emerge. The Beirut myth has echoes of the idea, found in Grosseteste, of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea collecting Christ's blood, as happens in the Grail legends. The Beirut icon is passed down from father to son, eventually producing a venerated effluvium of blood. A similar father-to son succession is described in the Grail legend. In some versions, as Leslie Fiedler notes in 'Why is the Grail Knight Jewish?' Galahad is descended from 'Joseph of Arimathea and the long line of Jews who succeeded him as Keepers of the Grail',<sup>44</sup> while in others it is Perceval who comes of the lineage of Joseph:

after Joseph's death no man had possession of [the Grail] unless he was of Joseph's lineage. In truth the Rich Fisher descended from him, and all his heirs, and, they say, Guillem Guenelaus and his son Perceval.<sup>45</sup>

The emphasis on blood lineage reminds us of a similar emphasis placed on Christ's blood descent from the Jewish patriarchs by the Church Fathers (whose own appellation is suggestive of blood lineage) in an attempt to use genealogy as a means of authentication.

Another parallel is the apostolic succession, a means used by the Church, with its celibate clergy, to rival the authority and authenticity gained by secular rulers through blood lineage. Fiedler notes the similarity with the lineage of the Grail, even speculating that one possible use for the Grail legend is 'to subvert the Roman Church by providing an alternative version of the apostolic succession'.<sup>46</sup> Whether or not subversion is intended, the Grail legend, and the blood relic tales of Beirut and Westminster make points about the importance of succession, of blood and of a descent from Jewish roots. In the absence of actual descendents of Christ who carry on the heritage of the Church in the way that secular rulers inherit the right to rule the State, the blood relic tale makes an argument for another kind of authenticity and

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<sup>44</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, 'Why is the Grail Knight Jewish? A Passover Meditation', in *Aspects of Jewish Culture in the Middle Ages: Papers of the Eighth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 3-5 May 1974*, ed. by Paul E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1979), pp. 151-70 (p. 158). In a comment following the paper, Alice Colby-Hall notes that 'this knight is indeed different from all other knights' (*Aspects of Jewish Culture*, p. 186).

<sup>45</sup> Fiedler, p. 165, citing the first continuation of Chrétien's version of the Grail story.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

validation through the passing down of a blood-related item from Jewish father to Jewish son.

In the *Legenda* tale, of course, the item handed down amongst the Jews is not a portion of Christ's blood but merely a picture of Christ crucified. Yet, following the issue of blood resulting from the Jewish assault on the picture, what the tale records as the surviving object of devotion is the phial of the miraculous blood which is preserved in Rome in a specially consecrated church. The icon has transformed itself into a blood relic of sorts. This, however, is not the blood of Christ's incarnation, but the result of a posthumous miracle. This raises the question of what relationship was thought to exist between these two kinds of medieval blood relics: on the one hand, blood supposed to have been shed by Christ himself, and on the other, blood that had miraculously issued from a Christian icon.

The debate as to whether Christ could have left physical relics, if he was assumed bodily and in a physically complete state into heaven, exercised the great minds of the day. Aquinas, for example, acknowledges in one passage a possibility that some of Christ's inferior 'nutrimental' or less intrinsic and thus less sacred blood could have survived,<sup>47</sup> while in another he insists that all Christ's blood was taken up with him at his resurrection.<sup>48</sup> But in both passages he ultimately concludes that relics of 'Christ's blood' were not shed by Christ during his lifetime: 'the blood relics to be seen in certain churches did not flow from Christ's side but, it might be said, miraculously, from some maltreated image of Christ.'<sup>49</sup> This important passage from Aquinas gives an alternative explanation for the blood relics worshipped in the churches. Even if the actual blood of Christ was not available, having risen with him on his assumption, there was still a form of blood relic that could exist, this being the miraculous sanguinary output of injured icons.

If Vincent is correct, such relics may have predated 'genuine' blood relics: he writes that 'claims to [...] possession' of the 'literal, historical blood of Christ's Passion' were 'a late development' and 'followed, indeed may well have been inspired by, a more ancient tradition of collecting the miraculous blood produced by

<sup>47</sup> Vincent, p. 101, citing *Questiones quodlibetales* 5q3 a1 in Aquinas, *S. Thomae Aquinatis opera omnia*, ed. R. Busa et al., Milan 1980, III, 466, columns 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 100, citing *Summa theologiae* 3a q54 a3 ad3, in *Opera Omnia*, II, 854, col. 1, and *The 'Summa Theologica' of St Thomas Aquinas*, (London, 1911-25), XVI, 394-6.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Also cf. Vincent, pp. 101-2.

images and the blessed sacrament'. Aquinas' statement is particularly intriguing, since, in the absence of any genuine relics of Christ's blood, miraculous relics from 'maltreated' images could then constitute, according to Aquinas, the sole form of blood relic extant. In any case, his comments appear to indicate a medieval willingness to regard miraculously generated 'blood' as being as sacred, as worthy of reverence, as any 'true' relic of Christ.<sup>50</sup> Since miraculous relics were derived from maltreated images (and, in host-desecration narratives such as those discussed by Miri Rubin, the maltreated eucharist), such maltreatment would be a necessary step in the creation of new sacred 'blood relics'. Given that the Jews were perhaps the likeliest group to appear in narratives as desecrators of hosts and icons, this gives this supposed form of hostile Jewish behaviour considerable importance.

By virtue of being, in legend, the attackers and desecrators of Christ's body and blood, Jews provided relics that gave ordinary Christians the opportunity for an intimate form of devotion. Miraculous relics of this kind can be seen as filling a need for direct contact with the physicality of Christ. We can see how, in medieval Christian devotional practice, the hostile attributes of the Jews are subtly linked with the idea of the Jew as witness. The same is true of the narratives we have discussed. In the first tale, the Jew's impulse to strike the image and his immediate conversion argue not only for the overwhelming power of Christian miracle but also for some underlying belief in Christian truth on the part of the Jew. In the second tale, the Jews' desire to re-enact the tortures of Christ's passion, their testing of the miraculous blood as a healing substance and the icon's creation and preservation by Jews supportive of Christianity similarly undermine the more obvious elements of their portrayal as hostile and abusive. In miracle tales, reliance on Jewish witness as a form of authorisation and validation is offset by the need for Jews to be hostile in order that their violence and unbelief may be answered by the transformative power of miracle.

In another chapter of the *Legenda*, Jewish hostility is depicted as being directed, not at a Christian image but at a Christian body, that of the Virgin Mary. In 'The Assumption of the Virgin', Jews attack Mary as she is being carried on her bier

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Vincent, pp. 46-51 for a discussion of 'effluvial' (relating to the miraculous flow of blood from images) and eucharistic blood relics.



to Mount Sion.<sup>51</sup> The tale may reflect medieval Christian anxieties concerning Jewish disbelief directed toward Marian doctrine, often expressed in disputational literature, in which Jewish characters voiced doubt and even disgust regarding the virgin birth and the possibility of God being born of a woman.<sup>52</sup> Jewish opposition to the doctrine of the virgin birth is literalised in this tale as a physical assault on Mary's body. The supposed enmity of hostile Jews towards Mary may also relate to the fact that in medieval theology Mary was seen as an especial foe of Satan. While Eve succumbed to Satan's temptation, thus bringing about the Fall, Mary in giving birth to the Redeemer atoned for the original sin.<sup>53</sup> Thus Mary was instrumental in undoing the effects of the Fall and of Satan's enmity.<sup>54</sup> Since the gospel of John had proclaimed of the Jews: 'You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you will do' (John 8. 44), and Jews were associated with the devil in medieval legend,<sup>55</sup> Mary could be cast as the enemy of the Jews as well. In his discussion of Marian miracle tales, Robert Worth Frank says of the admittedly small percentage of Marian miracles that are 'anti-Semitic' in tone that they are 'a commonplace in the genre, a standard, constituent element'.<sup>56</sup> The early '*Transitus*' apocrypha which formed one of Jacobus' sources for his 'Assumption' depict Jews behaving with enmity to Mary during her lifetime and immediately following her death.<sup>57</sup>

In 'The Assumption of the Virgin', Jacobus includes three versions of a narrative about Mary's death and bodily assumption into heaven. Also included in this chapter is a medieval legend with many variants,<sup>58</sup> of the 'Jewish boy' who after taking communion is pushed into a fiery oven by his father and rescued through the

<sup>51</sup> *GL* II, pp. 77-97; *LA*, pp. 504-27. Cf. also Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Quartet, 1976) pp. 83-6.

<sup>52</sup> In Justin's 'Dialogue with Trypho', Trypho objects to Justin's reading of Isias 7. 14 as a prophecy of Christ. Trypho also accuses Christians of repeating myths like those of the Greeks, citing the virgin birth of Perseus, and thinks that they should acknowledge that Jesus was human. (67, p. 254.) In his *Disputatio*, Odo of Cambrai makes his Jewish character, Leo, express disgust regarding the human birth of Christ. Cf. Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, p. 108.

<sup>53</sup> On Mary as the new Eve, see Maurice Hamington, *Hail Mary? The Struggle for Ultimate Womanhood in Catholicism* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 126-47, and Warner, pp. 50-78.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Warner, pp. 59-60.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Worth Frank, 'Miracles of the Virgin, Medieval Anti-Semitism, and the "Prioress's Tale"', in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. by Larry Benson & Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1982), pp. 177-88 (p. 179).

<sup>57</sup> cf. Warner, pp. 82-6, and Frank, pp. 181-2.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, pp. 8-28.



miraculous agency of the Virgin Mary. The 'Assumption' legend itself is known from Syriac texts dating from as early as the fourth century.<sup>59</sup> The earliest extant potential source (not cited by Jacobus) for the narratives that appear in the 'Assumption' chapter, in which Mary is bodily translated into heaven, is *Obsequies of the Holy Virgin* (c. 200-350). Other Syriac versions (c. 350-400) also exist.<sup>60</sup> These later versions, in the course of telling the story of Mary's assumption, mention that the Jews are plotting to kill her. In addition, Mary fears a Jewish attack upon her corpse after her death. As she is being carried, still living, towards the Mount of Olives,

a Jew tries to shake Mary off her litter, but an angel of fire severs his hands from his body and they remain, stuck to her bed. Mary hears his prayer, restores them to him, and he is converted. Peter gives him a miraculous staff, which cures all whom it touches.<sup>61</sup>

Following this is the moment of her *transitus* or bodily assumption.

Jacobus cites sources for each of the three versions of this tale. The first he attributes to 'a small apocryphal book attributed to John the Evangelist'.<sup>62</sup> The second he says is 'related in a sermon' compiled by Saint Cosmas Vestitor (*fl.* C10)<sup>63</sup> He gives the author of the third version as John of Damascus (c. 676-c. 749-51).<sup>64</sup> I will refer to these as the A, B and C versions respectively. As Warner notes, the early

<sup>59</sup> Warner, pp. 82-4. For a scholarly overview of the *Transitus* material, cf. Martin Jugie, *La Mort et l'assomption de la Sainte Vierge. Étude historico-doctrinale* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944), pp. 103-171.

<sup>60</sup> Warner, pp. 82-3, citing *Contributions to the Apocryphal Literature of the New Testament, Collected and Edited from Syriac Manuscripts, with an English Translation and Notes*, trans. and ed. by William Wright (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865).

<sup>61</sup> Warner, p. 83, citing material from Wright.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 691-723: 'The standard Greek text is the one attributed to St John the Theologian (Evangelist) and edited by Tischendorf. The standard Latin is that attributed to Melito of Sardis. Tischendorf published this as his *Transitus Mariae B*' (p. 691). Elliot cites *Apocalypses apocryphae*, ed. by Constantine von Tischendorf (Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1866; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1966), pp. xxxiv-xlvi, 95-112 (Greek) and pp. xxxiv-xlvi, 124-36 (Latin).

<sup>63</sup> Cosmas Vestitor, 'Sermones in dormitionem Beatae Mariae Virginis', in *L'assomption de la T. S. Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VI<sup>e</sup> au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle: Etudes et documents*, ed. by A. Wenger, Archives de l'Orient Chrétien 5 (Paris, Institut Français d'Etudes Byzantines, 1955), pp. 315-33.

<sup>64</sup> John of Damascus, *Homilia II in dormitionem*, Karlsruhe, ms. Aug. 80, ff. 91<sup>v</sup>-106<sup>v</sup>. The tenth-century biography of John by John, Patriarch of Jerusalem, *Joannis Damasceni, Opera Omnia: Vita S. P. N. Joannis Damasceni*, PG 94 (Paris: Migne, 1864), cols 429-90, relates that John of Damascus was sentenced to have his hand severed at the wrist because of a false accusation of treachery, but that the hand was restored by the Virgin Mary (cols 455-58). It is not clear whether there is any

Syriac version 'never mentions her death [...] she is translated to heaven [...]'<sup>65</sup> In the *Legenda* texts, however, Mary does undergo death before the assumption. A Greek version cited by Warner 'which claimed the eyewitness authority of the apostle John himself',<sup>66</sup> is thus probably the 'small apocryphal book' mentioned by Jacobus. In this version, Mary dies and her tomb is found empty three days later. In the *Legenda* versions, after her death her assumption is deferred for three days, and meanwhile her body is carried to 'the valley of Josaphat' (A),<sup>67</sup> or 'Gethsemane' (B and C).<sup>68</sup> Thus it is her dead body that is attacked by the Jew. Her carnal and spiritual selves are separated for a period, although her body remains pure and incorrupt. The body shines so brightly that it is obscured from view while it is being undressed and bathed (A),<sup>69</sup> praises God and claims to be worthy of glory (B),<sup>70</sup> and sanctifies the water it was washed in (C).<sup>71</sup>

In the A version, Peter and Paul carry the body on a litter, to the accompaniment of angelic singing. The people rush out to see what is happening, and realise that Mary's body is passing by. The narrative continues:

At once they hurried to take arms and exhorted each other, saying: 'Come on, let us kill all those disciples and burn the body that bore the seducer.' The chief priest, seeing what was happening, was astounded and filled with rage, and said: 'Look at the tabernacle of that man who disturbed us and our people so much! Look at the glory that is now paid to that woman!' After saying this he put his hands on the litter, intending to overturn it and throw the corpse to the ground. But suddenly his hands withered and stuck to the bier, so that he was hanging by his hands; and he moaned and cried in great pain, while the rest of the people were stricken with blindness by angels who were in the cloud. (*Tunc ad arma concurrunt et se mutuo hortabantur dicentes: venite, omnes discipulos occidamus et corpus illud, quod seductorem illum portavit, ignibus comburamus. Princeps autem sacerdotum hoc videns obstupuit et ira repletus ait: ecce tabernaculum illius, qui nos et genus nostrum conturbavit, qualem gloria nunc accipit. Et hoc dicens manus ad lectum misit volens illud evertere et ad terram deducere. Tunc manus ejus subito ambae aruerunt et lectulo adhaeserunt, ita ut ad lectulum manibus penderet et nimio cruciatur*

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connection, but the story of John's hand is an inversion (unjust severing of a hand, rather than punishment) of this episode from the sermons on the Assumption.

<sup>65</sup> Warner, p. 84.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> *GL* II, p. 80; *LA*, p. 521.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 92, 95; *ibid.*, pp. 521, 524.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 80; *ibid.*, p. 507.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 91; *ibid.*, p. 520.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 94; *ibid.*, p. 524.

*vexatus lamentabiliter ejularet, reliquus autem populus ab angelis, qui erant in nubibus, caecitate percussus est.)*<sup>72</sup>

The priest calls out for help, saying that he defended Peter when Peter was accused by the portress. Peter replies that he is too busy with the burial to help, but hopes that, if the priest believes in Christ and Mary, he will be healed. The priest says ‘I believe that the Lord Jesus is the true Son of God, and that this woman was his most holy mother’ (*‘credo, dominum Jesum verum esse filium Dei et hanc sacratissimam matrem ejus’*). Peter tells him to kiss the bier and say ‘I believe in Jesus Christ God, whom this woman carried in her womb and remained a virgin after she delivered her child’ (*‘credo in Deum Jesum Christum, quem ista in utero portavit et post partum virgo permansit’*). The priest says the words, is cured and is told to take a palm from John and hold it over those who have been blinded; this will cure those who are prepared to believe, but the others will not regain their sight.<sup>73</sup>

This version is the longest of the three, and the most specific with regard to the doctrine of the virgin birth and the insistence that the priest affirm his beliefs more precisely before being fully healed. The blindness of the populace is also a detail found only in A. In the B version, the priest’s punishment is even more extreme than in A:

Then the chief priests sent a crowd armed with swords and clubs. One of them rushed at the bier, hoping to drag the body of God’s mother to the earth; but because he had impiously tried to touch the corpse, his hands lost the power of touch. Both hands tore away at the elbows and clung to the litter, and the attacker was stricken with horrible pain. He begged for pardon and promised amendment. Peter said to him: ‘You will never obtain pardon unless you kiss the body of the ever Virgin and confess that Christ, born of her, is the Son of God.’ The culprit obeyed, and his hands were rejoined to the elbows. Peter then plucked a date from the palm branch and gave it to him, saying; ‘Go into the city and touch the sick with this date. Those who believe will be cured’. (*‘Tunc summi sacerdotes cum gladiis et fustibus multitudinem mittunt, unus autem impetum faciens ad grabatum accessit, cupiens ad terram trahere corpus genitricis Dei Mariae. Qui quia indigne tangere nititur, ejus tacta manibus merito privatur, utraque namque manus a cubitis evulsa absciditur illisque ad grabatum pendentibus dolore horribili cruciatur. Implorat autem veniam et promittit emendam. Cui Petrus:*

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 81; *ibid.*, p. 508.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.; *LA*, p. 509.

*nullatenus veniam consequi poteris, nisi corpus perpetuae virginis osculeris et Christum ex ea propagatum Dei filium esse confitearis. Quod cum fecisset, manus, unde avulsae fuerant, cubitis sunt adjunctae accipiensque Petrus unum dactylum ex palma dedit illi dicens: vade, ingredi civitatem et pone super infirmos et omnes, que crediderint, recipient sanitatem.’<sup>74</sup>*

In the A and B versions, the assailants are clearly meant to be Jewish, as the discussion below will help to elaborate, but the C version specifically names them as such:

Some Jews, hardened in their old malevolence, also showed themselves. It is said that as the sacred body of the mother of God was carried down from Mount Sion, a Hebrew, a true limb of Satan, ran up to the body which angels feared to approach, and in a spasm of fury laid both hands on the litter and dragged it to the ground. It is further said that one hand fell off dry as a stick, and it was a sight to see the man standing there with his useless stump, until faith changed his mind and he repented, bemoaning his crime. The bearers of the litter stood still, however, until the poor man put his hand on the most holy body, and at the touch it was restored to its pristine condition. (*‘Affuerunt et quidam Judaeorum fermento veteris malitiae obstinati. Referunt etiam, cum jam e monte Syon descenderent, sacrum corpus Dei genitricis ferentes, hebraeum quendam organum dyaboli temerario actum impetu dyabolique impulsu cursu ad sacrum corpus accessisse, ad quod angeli trepidabant accedere, ac utraque manu furibunde lectum arripiens ad terram traxisse. Fertur tamen manus illa tamquam lignum arida decidisse eratque videre tamquam truncum inutilem, donec fides mentem alteravit suique sceleris poenituit ingementem. Hi autem, qui portabant feretrum, stetero, donec miser imponens manum sanctissimo corpori ad tactum ejus in statum pristinum revocatur.’<sup>75</sup>*)

This version sets out the connection between the Jews and Satan, making use of the kind of anti-Jewish language used by St John Chrysostom, (as discussed in Chapter One) and developed in the later middle ages.

A notable point of these tales is the punitive nature of the miracles. The withering of the priest’s hands and (in A) the blindness visited upon the populace will only be removed upon conversion; in the priest’s case in A especially, adherence to explicitly outlined points of doctrine. This latter emphasis refers back to apologetic literature, in which Christian beliefs are debated and contrasted with

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-2; *ibid.*, pp. 520-1.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 94-5; *ibid.*, p. 524.

Jewish, pagan or heretical viewpoints.<sup>76</sup> In A, Peter insists on specific points of doctrine: the priest must not merely believe that Mary bore Christ, but that she remained virginal after the birth. It is certainly possible to see this as an answer to Jewish incredulity, in the tradition of patristic literature, as when Justin must defend his claim that Isaias 7. 14, 'Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son', is a prophecy of Christ, against Trypho's objection that the Hebrew text refers not to a virgin but to a young woman.<sup>77</sup> The 'Assumption' texts bypass the need for counterargument through the depiction of a miraculous event that causes the Jews openly to proclaim their belief.

Another aspect of punitive miracles, such as the blindness and withering or severing of hands, is the element of force, usually absent from 'literary' narratives dealing with miracle and conversion of Jews. As in the examples discussed above, the conversion of Jews in miracle narratives is usually brought about by the witnessing of a miracle in which a Christian image speaks, bleeds or suffers, acts in a protective manner or manifests an apparition of Christ or Mary. The revelation of truth resulting from seeing the miracle is in itself enough to bring about conversion. In addition, as we have seen, the use of the topos of the benign or supportive Jew often results in the depiction of characters who seem ready to convert with relatively little persuasion.

In the case of the *Legenda* 'Assumption', however, unbelief is dealt with by means of the punitive miracle. In A, the punishment itself may result from the violent attack on Mary's body, but the Jewish priest can only be freed if he professes belief in Christ and the virgin, and is only fully cured when he accepts Mary's virginity after Christ's birth. Similarly, the crowd who have been struck with blindness by the angel will be cured only if they believe, while the rest will remain blind. In B, belief is likewise the only escape from punishment. In C, faith 'change[s] the priest's mind' and he repents before being cured by touching the body.

This draws uncomfortably close to the reality of much Jewish conversion to Christianity in the middle ages. Crusading armies and other forces offered Jews in Christian towns the alternative of conversion or death, and at times, converts could

<sup>76</sup> Cf. for example Justin's 'Dialogue with Trypho'.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 67, p. 254.



be treated with suspicion and could fail to integrate into the Christian community.<sup>78</sup> Many miracle tales featuring Jews present conversion as an unrealistic form of closure, creating a fictional rhetoric of miracle and nonviolent conversion. This rhetoric was able to bypass the difficulties of the need to use force. One of these difficulties was that the need for force implied the failure of the power of icons and miracles, and also of preaching, to confer grace and effect conversion.<sup>79</sup>

However, the reverse side to the bliss of God's love is the misery suffered by those who refuse it. Punitive miracles would not have been seen as evidence that the Christian God or Christians themselves were capable of cruelty, any more than Dante's wish to see Fillippo Argentini's shade tormented in the mud of the marsh in *Inferno* was meant to be interpreted as cruelty on Dante's part.<sup>80</sup> Rather, the sufferings of the priest and his people could be seen as outward emblems of an inner fall from grace, as the prophets of the future in *Inferno* are punished by being twisted round so that their faces look backwards.<sup>81</sup> The withered hands may symbolise the failure of faith, the reliance on the sense of touch in order to comprehend the sacred mysteries, and as it relates to the Jews, the carnal rather than spiritual understanding with which they were supposed to be afflicted. The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is another medieval work featuring a Jew who suffers affliction of the hands after putting the stolen Eucharist to tortures reminiscent of Christ's Passion.<sup>82</sup>

The withered or severed hands, in the *Legenda* 'Assumption' as well as in Croxton, might also seem like a fitting punishment for one who attempted to offer physical violence to the bodies of Mary or Christ. However, there is a Marian legend from the New Testament apocrypha, the legend of Salome, in which a burning and possibly severed hand is the punishment, not for any violent act against Mary, but rather for Salome's attempt to determine the truth of Mary's post-partum virginity by

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<sup>78</sup> Stacey, in 'The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England', notes of forced conversion: 'there is [...] a recurrent historical connection between the forced baptism of Jews by Christians and subsequent suspicions on the part of the Old Christians that the New Christians were insincere in their faith,' and discusses papal concerns about relapsed Jewish converts (pp. 281-2). He discusses the *Domus Conversorum*, a house for Jewish converts founded in London by Henry III in 1232, and the fact that many Jewish converts and their families remained living there, suggesting difficulties in starting life anew in the Christian community (p. 267, pp. 273-280).

<sup>79</sup> On the position of the Church regarding forced conversion, cf. Grayzel, I, pp. 13-15.

<sup>80</sup> For the Argentini episode, cf. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. by John Sinclair, 3 vols (New York: OUP, 1961), III: *Inferno*, 8, Italian, ll. 31-66, p. 112; English, p. 113.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, Italian, ll. 10-18, p. 248, English, pp. 249 ff.

<sup>82</sup> 'The Play of the Sacrament', ll. 499-820, pp. 73-4; ll. 628-61, pp. 77-8; and ll. 770-8, p. 82.



means of touch.<sup>83</sup> Here again this point of doctrine is stressed: Salome, with only carnal understanding, cannot believe that Mary has remained intact without physical proof. This is reminiscent of the doubts of Thomas in John 20. 24-29. But while Thomas is forgiven for doubting, Salome's hand is injured and can only be restored by her return to faith. The significant difference seems to be that Thomas, in the *Legenda* and in the gospels, is respectful. In the gospel account, Thomas is invited to place his fingers in Christ's wounds. Salome, however, touches without invitation, and furthermore touches Mary's body in a taboo place. This, like the priest's violence in the *Legenda* 'Assumption', constitutes a defilement of the sacred body, and merits punishment. All of these narratives contrast 'Jewish' carnal understanding, a physical approach to the sacred, with the blessed nature of the transfigured body: Mary's body, intact in the Salome myth, radiant and cloaked in modesty in the 'Assumption', and the body of Christ in the Croxton play, which appears unscathed from the tortured Host.

As in host desecration tales, in which the Eucharist is subjected by Jews to a re-enactment of the tortures of the Passion, the imitation of events concerning Christ's life and death can be found in the *Legenda* 'Assumption'. Marina Warner suggests that the role of the hostile Jews in the early assumption legends is to bring in an element of equivalence between Mary's life and Christ's. 'An annunciation (of Mary's death) by an angel; an agony in the garden (Mary weeping and begging to die by Christ's sepulchre); hostile Jews (as in Christ's passion); a sepulchre closed by a stone; and in some of the Greek versions a three-day burial before the tomb is found empty – the framework is openly modelled on the Gospels'.<sup>84</sup> This suggests how ingrained the pattern of *imitatio Christi* was in Christian narrative from an early period. Many miracle narratives feature hostile Jews who re-create the scene of Christ's Passion only to discover that Christ himself is present and miraculously manifest.

Yet, as in the other tales from the *Legenda* discussed earlier in this chapter, the topos of the hostile Jew is not entirely straightforward in the 'Assumption'. The 'chief priest' in the A version is identified as a hostile Jew by his violence towards Mary and subsequent punishment. However, in his appeal to Peter's mercy he also

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<sup>83</sup> 'The Protevangelium of James'; cf. Elliot, pp. 48-67, and esp. pp. 64-50.

claims to be a supporter: 'You must remember how I stood by you and defended you when the portress accused you.' (*memor enim debes esse, qualiter aliquando tibi adstiti et qualiter te accusante ancilla ostiaria excusavi.*)<sup>85</sup> This seems to identify the chief priest with Caiaphas, the high priest, who, in the gospel of John, is present, or at least in the same house, when the woman who keeps the door identifies Peter as one of the disciples (this woman is not a portress or doorkeeper in the other gospels).<sup>86</sup> In the gospels there is no account of Caiaphas defending Peter. However, the priest's appeal to Peter in the A version recalls the role of Gamaliel, who defends the apostles in Acts 5. 34-40, and who appeared along with other Jews as a custodian of an image of Christ in the 'Exaltation of the Holy Cross'. While the priest's attempt to portray himself as a potential supporter in the 'Assumption' could be read as a desperate appeal to Peter's sympathy, it also emphasises the dual role of the Jews as the initial recipients of God's special grace, as well as subsequent outcasts, and emphasises as well the importance of the Jews as witnesses to the events of the Gospels.

The 'Assumption' contrasts this narrative of Jewish violence and unbelief with a gentler narrative, also dealing with unbelief and proof. The parallels with this tale and others in the miracle genre with the gospel account of Thomas has already been mentioned. The A version includes its own very brief Thomas episode, after the moment at which the Virgin is taken up bodily into heaven. Thomas is not there to witness this event, and remains unsure as to what has happened:

Thomas, however, was absent, and when he came back refused to believe. Then suddenly the girdle that had encircled her body fell intact into his hands, and he realized that the Blessed Virgin had really been assumed body and soul. (*Thomas autem cum abesset et rediens credere recusaret, subito zonam, qua corpus ejus praecinctum fuerat, ab aëre recepit illaesam, ut vel sic intelligeret, quod totaliter fuisset assumpta.*)<sup>87</sup>

Jacobus cites Jerome as doubting the veracity of this episode: he quotes St. Jerome, in a 'letter to Paula and Eustochium' as saying 'there are a lot of things narrated in

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<sup>84</sup> Warner, pp. 85-6.

<sup>85</sup> *GL* II, p. 81; *LA*, p. 508.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Matt. 26. 69 and 26. 71; Mark 14. 66 and 14. 69; Luke 22. 56; and John 18. 17.

<sup>87</sup> *GL* II, p. 82; *LA*, p. 509.

the book [the apocryphal work attributed to John] that are pure invention rather than fact, for instance, that Thomas was not present and doubted when he came' (*'Porro alia multa sunt ibi posita potius ad simulationem, quam ad veritatem, ut, quod Thomas non affuerit et veniens dubitaverit'*).<sup>88</sup>

The B version also contains an episode in which an apostle doubts the Assumption, and insists that the tomb be opened. The objection is put forth that 'if the infidels got wind of this, they might spread a rumour that the body had been stolen.' (*'[...]si hoc infideles intelligerent, corpus furto sublatum esse praeciderent [...]'*)<sup>89</sup> Here, a different echo of the gospels is found: in Matthew 27, the Pharisees express a wish to Pilate that the sepulchre of Christ be guarded, 'lest perhaps his disciples come and steal him away, and say to the people: He is risen from the dead' (Matt. 27. 64). Like the Thomas episode in A, this episode in B serves to reinforce the parallels already mentioned between Mary and Christ. These parallels reinforce the point that Mary was the first person who, like all the Christian saints who were to follow, died a death closely resembling that of Christ.

The Thomas episode also mirrors the high priest episode in A, replacing the violent priest with Thomas, the believing Jew who yet disbelieves, and is gently rewarded (in the gospel account, gently rebuked as well) by receiving the physical proof he desires. It is significant that the intact girdle, also perhaps symbolic of the disputed point of doctrine, falls into Thomas' hands, thus reinforcing the parallel with the withered hands of the priest. Here the narrative seems to be exploring the parameters of disbelief, with Thomas' unbelief being acceptable, if not ideal, whereas the chief priest's is unacceptable. The different categories of Jews are also explored; Thomas is a Jew, and still seeks 'carnal' proof of spiritual truth, yet he is also a follower of Christ and an early Christian. The chief priest, however, represents the forces which put Christ to death, and as such receives punishment before his conversion.

Punishment is also a feature of the 'Jewish boy' legend which appears in the *Legenda* 'Assumption' chapter. Inserted between the A version of the story of the assumption and the B and C versions are seven short tales which deal with the mythic aspect of Mary, who appears in the medieval period as a champion and

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

defender. These tales are anecdotal in style, relating the help Mary gives to, for example, a valiant knight who had given away all his money, a monk given to lechery, and woman being harassed by the devil.<sup>90</sup> In certain of these tales, notably the tale of the lecherous monk, Mary is shown to prize devotion shown to her personally over strict Christian observance, although in the case of the monk he does return to his vows after Mary's intervention to save him from the devil.<sup>91</sup> Mary opposes the devil in five of the seven tales. Only one tale involves Jews, the tale of the Jewish boy who is saved from a fiery oven.

Miri Rubin has cited many variants of the 'Jewish boy' legend.<sup>92</sup> The version cited by Jacobus goes as follows:

In the city of Bourges, about the year of the Lord 527, the Christians were receiving holy communion on Easter Sunday, and a Jewish boy went to the altar and received the Lord's Body with the others. When he went home, his father asked him where he had been, and he answered that he had gone to church with his schoolmates and had taken communion with them. The father, furious, picked the lad up and threw him into a white-hot furnace. At once, however, the mother of God, looking like a painting that the boy had seen on the altar, came to his side and kept him unharmed by the fire. The boy's mother's outcries brought together a number of Christians and Jews, and seeing the lad unscathed in the furnace they pulled him out and asked him how he had been able to escape the flames. 'That venerable lady who stood above the altar,' he answered, 'helped me and held the fire away from me.' The Christians present, understanding that he referred to the image of the Blessed Virgin, seized the boy's father and cast him into the furnace, where he was immediately burned up and reduced to ashes. (*In civitate Bituricensi circa annos domini DXXVII, cum christiani in die paschae communicarent, cum pueris christianorum quidam puer Judaeorum ad altare accedens corpus domini cum iisdem percepit. Reversus domum, cum a patre, unde venisset, interrogaretur, respondit se cum pueris christianis, cum quibus ad scholas ibat, ad ecclesiam ivisse et cum iis communicasse. Tunc pater ejus furore repletus puerum apprehendit et continuo in fornacem ardentem, qui ibidem erat, projecit. Statim autem Dei genitrix in specie imaginis, quam puer super altare viderat, eidem adfuit et eum illaesum ab igne servavit. Mater vero pueri multos christianorum et Judaeorum suis clamoribus congregavit, qui videntes puerum in fornace nil laesiones habentem ipsum inde extraxerunt et, quomodo potuisset evadere, interrogaverunt. Qui respondit: quoniam illa reverenda domina, quae super altare stabat, mihi*

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 92; *ibid.*, p. 521.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-8; *ibid.*, pp. 513-7.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>92</sup> *Gentile Tales*, pp. 8-28.

*auxilium praebuit et omne a me incendium propulsavit. Tunc christiani intelligentes esse imaginem beatae Mariae patrem pueri acceperunt et ipsum in fornacem projecerunt, qui continuo combustus et penitus consumtus est.)*<sup>93</sup>

Here the throwing of the child into the oven has some notable implications. 'Burial' of a Christian sacred object or the body of a murdered Christian, casting it into an oven, cauldron, well, pit or privy are common plot events in miracle narratives. This common theme may relate to the gospel accounts of Christ's burial and resurrection, since the 'buried' person or object usually emerges transformed in a mystical way. Charity, daughter of St Sophia, for example, emerges unharmed from a furnace, like the Jewish boy:

...she was thrown into a fiery furnace, out of which the flames leapt over sixty yards and killed six thousand idolaters, while the child walked unscathed in the midst of fire and shone like gold. (*[...] in caminum ignitum projici, a quo per sexaginta cubitos ignis exiens sex millia ydolatrorum occidit, virgo autem illaesa in igne medio ambulabat ita, ut quasi aurum radiaret.*)<sup>94</sup>

The Eucharist in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, following immersion in a cauldron and being put into an oven, transforms into a figure of Christ,<sup>95</sup> and the murdered child in Chaucer's 'Prioress' Tale' emerges from the privy where the Jews have cast him, singing despite his cut throat, by the grace of the Virgin Mary.<sup>96</sup> In Jacobus' 'Exaltation' chapter, discussed above, a Jew throws a desecrated and bleeding image of Christ into a well, and when it emerges, still bleeding, it is seen to be miraculous and causes the conversion of the Jew.<sup>97</sup> In 'St Barnabas, Apostle', Jews murder Barnabas and hide his bones in a lead urn, but a disciple rescues them and buries them in a crypt, whence they are miraculously revealed after hundreds of years and worshipped. This pattern can be typologically linked to similar episodes in the Old Testament, such as Joseph in the pit (Genesis 37. 20-36), and Jonah's three-day sojourn in the whale's belly, called the 'belly of hell' (Jonah 2. 3).

This period of interment or immersion of a Christian person or object that sometimes features in miracle narrative can be read in various ways. In the 'Jewish

<sup>93</sup> *GL* II, pp. 87-8; *LA*, pp. 515-6.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185; *ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>95</sup> The 'Play of the Sacrament', ll. 712-40, p. 80.

<sup>96</sup> The 'Prioress' Tale', ll. 611-65, pp. 211-2.



boy' legend, the oven may have a significance connected with the bread of the Eucharist,<sup>98</sup> but it can also be read as a hellmouth. The Jewish boy is protected from the fires of hell because he has taken communion in front of a painting of the Virgin (in some versions), thus prompting Mary's miraculous intervention. He thus emerges unscathed, but nothing intervenes to save his father, guilty of attempted child-murder, an echo of the blood-libel myth, and of unbelief and hostility towards Christianity, who is condemned to burn in the flames. The idea of Jews being damned by virtue of their Jewishness is indicated by a manuscript illustration representing Hell, in which, among various other scenes, Jews in peaked hats are being fed by devils into a special fiery cauldron labelled '*Judei*'.<sup>99</sup> The message of the 'Jewish Boy' may work on two levels, firstly indicating that the Jews, otherwise condemned to damnation, can save themselves by adopting Christian belief and Christian practice, and secondly, that faith, here represented by the taking of communion and Marian devotion, is what rescues all sinners from the fires of hell. There are also echoes of aspects of the resurrection story here: the 'burial' and miraculous emergence of the living child not only refer back to the resurrection of Christ from the tomb but also, with Mary enacting Christ's role, to the harrowing of Hell. The narrative pattern of emergence through flame and subsequent transformation or purification may suggest the fire of purgatory as well.

The 'interment' topos may in broader thematic terms be seen as part of the working out of a birth myth in which the 'new' religion, Christianity, emerges out of the comparative darkness of the pre-Christian Old Testament era. This may help to explain why in host-desecration narratives it is often an image of the Christ child that appears, even though the Eucharist refers back to the Last Supper and a mature Christ. Similarly, blood-libel narratives and images feature Jews attacking a young Christian child, the 'Prioress' Tale' being possibly the best-known example. The 'Jewish Boy' is a slightly different example of this topos: a Jewish child who has taken Christian communion attacked by a murderous Jewish father. Blumenkranz cites an image of Christ and the merchants of the temple, in which the merchants are

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<sup>97</sup> *GL* II, p. 171; *LA*, p. 608.

<sup>98</sup> *Gentile Tales*, pp. 25 and 27.

<sup>99</sup> Miniature in the *Hortus deliciarum* of Herrad of Landsberg, c. 1185, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, f.255R, in Schreckenberg, plate 13 (following p. 240).



portrayed with long beards, unlike a youthful-looking Christ and a follower, and comments '[...] on peut [...] se demander [...] si l'intention de l'artiste n'a pas été d'exprimer l'opposition de l'Ancien et du Nouveau par des vieux et des jeunes: d'un côté l'ancien Judaïsme périmé, de l'autre côté le Christianisme nouveau, dans la force de sa jeunesse, conscient de sa puissance.'<sup>100</sup> ('We may [...] ask [...] whether the artist's intention was not to express the opposition of the Old and the New by means of the old and young men: on one side, Judaism, old and obsolete, and on the other, the new faith of Christianity, with the impetus of youth, aware of its power.') Judaism is portrayed as the elder religion; despite the hostility of the Jewish 'parent', Christianity, symbolised by images of youth, prevails.

However, like Chaucer's 'Prioress' Tale', Jacobus' version of the 'Jewish boy' tale also reveals the hostility of the new religion towards the old. Despite the existence of variants of both of these tales that feature Jewish conversion as the outcome of miracle, Chaucer and Jacobus both depict Christian violence towards Jews as the finale of the tale, in the aftermath of the miracle when an account of Jewish conversion would normally occur. At the end of miracle tales, unbelieving Jews who do not convert are usually punished, often by being put to death, as in the 'Prioress' tale'.<sup>101</sup> Historically, as we have also discussed, Jewish conversion to Christianity was often forced and occurred in the wake of violence rather than as the follow-up to a miracle. In the two tales just cited, the conversion element is omitted and the tales reach closure with the theme of punishment. The deaths meted out to the Jews are seen as justified within the confines of the narratives: in both tales, the violence shown towards Jews can be seen as a punishment for child-murder, attempted or successful. With hindsight, however, we can see Chaucer's and Jacobus' variants of these tales as echoing a historical situation in which tales about Jewish hostility put medieval Jewish communities in danger.

In medieval Christian theology, Jewish hostility and the ultimate sin of deicide were seen as stemming ultimately from Jewish ignorance, that is, from a 'carnal' rather than a spiritual outlook which failed to recognise the divinity of

<sup>100</sup> Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Le Juif médiéval au miroir de l'art chrétien* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1966), p. 19, citing fig. 7, Nuremberg, Germanisches Museum, Évangélaire, *Codex Aureus* d'Echternach, c. 983-991, Cod. AG 50, fol. 53, detail.

<sup>101</sup> The 'Prioress' Tale', ll. 628-34, p. 211.

Christ. This raises questions as to what part carnality, physicality and the body play in these Christian legends about Jews and miracles. Jacobus' legend of the 'Jewish boy', like the other short Marian legends that accompany it, are posthumous myths that show Mary intervening to protect her followers as a spiritual, rather than a physical presence. Yet, in the 'Jewish boy', Mary manifests, looking like her image in the church, that is, appearing as though in bodily form, and is able to hold the flames away from the child. Contradictions to do with physicality pervades the *Legenda* 'Assumption' chapter as a whole and particularly the sections relating to the assumption itself. On the one hand, carnal understanding is condemned as being responsible for the desire to hurt or even perhaps to touch a spiritually exalted body. On the other, the fact that it is Mary's body, and not simply her soul, is taken up is of the greatest importance. After narrating the A version of the tale, Jacobus relates how St. Elizabeth in her Revelations has visions proving that Mary was assumed 'in the flesh as well as in spirit' (*tam in carne quam in spiritu*).<sup>102</sup> 'It is noteworthy,' he comments, 'that the glorious Virgin Mary was assumed and exalted integrally, honorably, joyfully and splendidly' (*Notandum est ergo, quod gloriosa virgo Maria assumpta et exaltata est integraliter, honorabiliter, laetanter et excellenter*).<sup>103</sup> He goes on to quote arguments by St. Bernard, St. Jerome and St. Augustine supporting the Virgin's bodily assumption. Mary's flesh is glorified and free from corruption, but Jacobus stresses again and again that it is still flesh.

Given the parallels between Mary and Christ in the tales, these arguments also refer back to the idea of the conjoined fleshly and spiritual nature of Christ. Jacobus cites St. Augustine's argument as to why Mary's body was assumed rather than being left to rot:

Putrescence and the worm are the shame of the human condition. Since Jesus has no part in that shame, Mary's nature, which Jesus, as we know, took from her, is exempt from it. (*putredo namque et vermis humanae est opprobrium conditionis, a quo opprobrium cum Jesus alienus sit, Mariae natura excipitur, quam Jesus de ea assumsisse probatur.*)<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *GL* II, p. 83; *LA*, p. 510.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *GL* II, p. 83; *LA*, p. 511.

The medieval Christian preoccupation with affirming a sacred physicality was reflected in miracle tales; the miracles offered physical, rather than intellectual or merely visionary proof of spiritual truths. The need for physical proof is gratified rather than ignored in these miracle narratives, reinforcing an idea that this was the most basic ground for faith. Thus, the nature of medieval miracles and the structure of the tales that related them both suggest that, in miracle narratives, the 'carnal' level of the physical body is, as an element in narrative, an important didactic tool.

In miracle tales, the role of the Jew, who is associated with the 'carnal' level of understanding, thus contains inherent contradictions. One problem is that it was only the Jews living at the time of Christ or afterwards, and who rejected or opposed Christ, who were truly thought of as possessing only carnal understanding. The Israelites of the Old Testament, in following the Lord and being chosen by God to experience revelations, were seen as having displayed spiritual understanding. The role of Jews as witnesses insisted upon by Augustine was based on the need for Christians to be able to demonstrate what they considered to be Biblical prophecies of Christ by referring to the Hebrew scriptures which the Jews continued to use. However, in the tales, other 'witness' roles for Jews emerge: the handing down of important Christian relics from Jew to Jew, which we saw as important in episodes from the 'Exaltation' chapter, is an example. Thus, echoes of their comparatively spiritually exalted past, and of their having been the people from whom Christ emerged, with some assumed ancestral memory of the events of Christ's life and death, mingle with depictions of Jewish hostility in the miracle tales.

Even where Jews were associated with a 'carnal' level of understanding, medieval Christian attitudes toward them could not be straightforward, since the Christian ideal of sacred physicality meant that carnality, while on one level despised, was on another very necessary. In discussing these tales we have seen that the danger involved in the Jewish threat to the purity of icons or sacred bodies became a necessary catalyst for the bringing forth of miracle, revelation, redemption and a return to grace. Within the context of miracle tales, the transformation of Jewish 'carnal' understanding was enacted on the physical plane. Jewish hostility towards the palpable symbols of Christian faith, like statues, pictures and crosses, attempted to invert, pervert, injure or defile these objects. In miracle narratives, these

inversions and threats to the holy body were the crux of the emergence of revelation. Ironically, in the middle ages, it was the 'carnal' or non-spiritual perception of the Jews that was thought to prevent them from grasping concepts like the incarnation and virgin birth, consubstantiation, transubstantiation and bodily resurrection, all doctrines of the perfectibility of the body. Yet the nature of these Christian doctrines themselves ensured that the body, the hands, the actions of touching, bleeding, speaking, and of physical attacks upon objects were central themes of the miracle tales that sought to support and confirm the doctrine. The Christian insistence on the word made flesh was ultimately what brought miracle narratives like those from the *Legenda* 'Exaltation' and 'Assumption' back to the body, and to the Jew, as the locus for miraculous persuasion.

## Chapter Four: The Benign Jew

In medieval Christian literature the Jew was not merely a reviled figure, but also a necessary one, a catalyst for miraculous intervention in human affairs. Jews could serve as spiritual examples for Christians, and could be seen as surprisingly benign figures; even, in the *Legenda*, to the extent of being the guardians of the ultimate Christian secret, the location of the cross on which Christ was crucified. Not only the patriarchs of the Old Testament, but also Jews living after the time of Christ, could be seen as carriers of an occult and sacred tradition, echoing their ancient covenant with God. Jews exemplified both the virtue of adhering to the covenant, and the sin of failing to recognise that the covenant had changed its nature with the advent of Christ. These were the paradigms of the 'Jew' that medieval Christian writers could draw upon in creating positive or negative examples for their Christian readers. One example used by Augustine was that of the consequences of falling away from God, or refusing to accept Christ:

[...] the Jews who slew Him and would not believe in Him, who would not believe that it behoved Him to die and rise again, suffered a more unhappy destruction at the hands of the Romans and were utterly rooted out from their kingdom, where they had already been under the dominion of foreigners. They were scattered throughout the whole world [...] (*Judaei [...] qui eum occiderunt, et in eum credere noluerunt, quia oportebat eum mori et resurgere, vastati infelicius a Romanis, funditusque a suo regno, ubi jam eis alienigenae dominabantur, eradicati dispersique per terras [...]*).<sup>1</sup>

Although this was a negative example, it was potentially useful to Christians, in showing them a living example of the consequences of not accepting Christ.

However, Jews were not only cited as negative examples of unbelief, hostility or ignorance. They could also be used as an example of virtue, as Langland does in *Piers Plowman*:

[...] A Jew wolde noght se a Jew go jangling for defaute  
For alle the mebles on this moolde, and he amende it myghte.

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<sup>1</sup> *City of God*, 18.46, p. 891; *De civitate Dei*, PL 41, col. 608.

‘Allas that a Cristene creature shal be unkynde til another!  
 Syn Jewes, that we jugge Judas felawes,  
 Eyther helpeth oother of hem of that that hym nedeth.  
 Whi nel we Cristene [be of Cristes good as kynde]  
 As Jewes, that ben oure loresmen? Shame to us alle! [...]’<sup>2</sup>

This is a complex statement about both Jewish behaviour and Christian perceptions of Jews. Langland depicts Jews possessing virtue, but with limitations. Jews are ‘our loresmen’, who imparted the scriptures and thus the moral laws of the Old Testament. They behave charitably, but only towards fellow Jews. However, the limitations of Jewish charity need not reflect poorly upon Jews. The lament ‘allas that a Cristene creature shal be unkynde til another’, suggests that the Christian charity Langland urges should be similarly confined within Christian communities. Langland also includes a pejorative statement about Jews, saying that ‘we jugge [the Jews] Judas felawes’, yet, while he reports the judgement, he is not necessarily endorsing it. The verse as a whole questions Christian rather than Jewish behaviour, implying a Christian failure of charity, and perhaps also of judgement, since the Jews he describes do not behave treacherously, as Judas did, but with loyalty and nurture, to their own people at least.

Langland may be implying that the ‘shame’ in the last line not only refers to Christian failings in the matter of charity, but also to the Christians’ having to be taught good behaviour by ‘Judas felawes’. Christians are shamed by being less true to ‘Christian’ virtues than are the ‘Judas-like’ Jews of the Christian imagination. Langland distinguishes between Jews, who are by definition like Judas, and Christians, who are by definition like Christ, but also notes that Jews do not necessarily behave like Judas, nor Christians like Christ, and that therefore the real distinction to be made is between ‘Judas-like’ or treacherous, and ‘Christ-like’ or charitable behaviour, not necessarily practised by Jews and Christians respectively. This he makes explicit a few lines further on: ‘*Proditor est prelatus cum Iuda qui patrimonium Christi minus distribuit*’ (‘A traitor along with Judas is the prelate who falls short in distributing Christ’s goods’).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17*, ed. by A. V. C. Schmidt, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Dent, 1995), 9, ll. 82-8, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> *Piers Plowman*, 9, ll. 93-4 and n. 92a, p. 134.



It is difficult to say whether there is any echo of the medieval Christian attitude to the virtuous Jews of the Old Testament in Langland's portrait of the charitable Jew who can serve as a spiritual example to Christians. Many Old Testament Jews were portrayed in the gospels and in medieval literature as virtuous in their adherence to Jewish religious practices. In the *Legenda* chapter 'The Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary', Jacobus relates that Mary 'came to the Temple in order to be purified according to the custom prescribed by the Law', adding 'although she was not bound by that Law' ('*beata virgo ad templum venit, ut secundum legis consuetudinem mundaretur, cum tamen sub illa lege non teneretur*').<sup>4</sup> He says this, not to argue that Mary, being kin to Christ, is no longer obliged to follow Mosaic practice, but because she had not become unclean in giving birth. However, Mary submits to the Law out of 'humility' ('*humilitatis*').<sup>5</sup> Christ also submits to the Law and its 'remedies established against original sin' ('*omnia remedia contra originale peccatum*') in order to 'fulfill the Law [...] if he had not abided by the Law, the Jews could have excused themselves and said: "We do not accept your teaching because you are not like our fathers and you do not observe the traditions of the Law"' ('*ut legem impleret*')[...] *Nam si in hoc legem solvisset, potuissent se Iudaei excusare et dicere: quoniam doctrinam tuam non recipimus, ex eo quod dissimilis es patribus nec legis traditiones observas*').<sup>6</sup>

This passage distinguishes Christ and Mary from 'the Jews'; but it also states that to minister to the Jews effectively, and to fulfill the Law, Christ had to be 'like our fathers', in other words, like the patriarchs in obeying Mosaic law. As in the passage from Langland, the idea of 'likeness' is important: Langland asks whether it is Jews or erring Christians who are 'like' Judas, and Jacobus specifies that, in respect of his obedience to the Law, Christ is 'like' the Jews. Unlike *caritas* in the *Piers Plowman* example, however, adherence to the Law is a specifically Jewish virtue, and so Jacobus shows Christ both aligning himself with Jewish virtue and superseding it, where Langland can urge *caritas*, of which the Jews only happen to present an example, on his Christian readers. Still, Langland's presentation of Jewish

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<sup>4</sup> *GL* I, p. 143; *LA*, p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *GL* I, p. 145; *LA*, pp. 159-60.

virtue may indirectly owe something to Christian veneration of Old Testament Israelite virtue.

The passage cited from the 'Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary' situates Christ in the context of Jewish cultic worship and its heritage of obedience to God. If the Jewish cult is valued here because it was established by God to prepare for the Incarnation, Christ also gains authority by having his beginnings within this established tradition. As discussed in Chapter One, the early Fathers claimed that the Jewish Scriptures prophesied Christ, who brought the fulfilment and supersession of the Jewish law. They used these arguments in order to present the Christian case both to the pagan communities in which it was developing, and to heretics who wished to dissociate Christianity from the Jewish scriptures. Responding to Faustus the Manichaeon, Augustine explained:

if Christ had not been preached by the law [sic], the Lord Himself would not have said, 'If ye believe Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me' [John 5. 46]; nor would He have borne the testimony He did after His resurrection, saying, 'All things must needs be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me' [Luke 24. 44]. (*Si autem Christum non praedicaret, non ipse Dominus diceret, 'si crederetis Moysi, crederetis et mihi; de me enim ille scripsit' (Joan. V, 46); nec post resurrectionem sic ei attestaretur, dicens, 'oportebat impleri omnia quae scripta sunt in Lege Moysi, et Prophetis, et Psalmis de me'. (Luc. XXIV, 44.)*)<sup>7</sup>

According to this discourse, Christ both authenticates the Jewish tradition and is authenticated by it. The citing of scriptural tradition in this passage is a narrative technique that parallels the citing of the pedigree of an image in the 'Beirut' blood-relic tale, discussed in Chapter Three, in which a picture of Christ miraculously bleeds after an attack by Jews. The stated provenance of the picture, said to have been painted by Nicodemus, who tended Christ's dead body, links the picture and its miraculous effluvium with Christ's own history, his body, and his death.<sup>8</sup> The narrative technique employed in both cases is to situate an important person or object within a tradition that confers authentication.

<sup>7</sup> 'Reply to Faustus', 12.3, p. 184; *Contra Faustum*, col. 255.

<sup>8</sup> *GL* II, p. 171; *LA*, pp. 608-9.

This process was an important part of the development of Christianity in its early days. Regarding the establishment of a canon of writings in the Christian Church, Ernst Robert Curtius points out that ‘unwritten sayings of the Lord [...] were passed on by word of mouth; and the Phrygian bishop Papias, even as late as the beginning of the second century, went about listening to presbyters in the hope of hearing sayings of the Lord’s disciples, because he believed that he received more profit from a “living voice” than from books’.<sup>9</sup> The transmission of God’s word from one human being to another to create a living tradition is a powerful example of an authenticating tradition, which could offer early Christians a sense of continuity with the time of Christ’s ministry. In medieval Christian writings, the idea of *auctoritas* could be evoked in an analogous way.

What is being handed down and received by Papias is a ‘saying,’ so the original voice, the author of the narrative, becomes important. ‘In a [medieval] literary context’, says A.J. Minnis, ‘the term *auctor* denoted someone who was at once a writer and an authority, someone not merely to be read but also to be respected and believed’.<sup>10</sup> The idea is also connected with history: ‘a source derives its authority, or *auctoritas*, from its antiquity’.<sup>11</sup> The title of *auctor* was given, says Minnis, only to those whose works fulfilled two important criteria: those of ‘intrinsic worth’ and ‘authenticity’. To have ‘intrinsic worth’, a work must be compatible with ‘Christian truth’. To have ‘authenticity’, a work had to be ‘the genuine production of a named *auctor*’;<sup>12</sup> in other words, it must be traceable back to a trusted source. The most revered ultimate source is the word of God: St Gregory says that it is ‘superfluous’ to ask who wrote the Book of Job, since ‘by faith’ it is believed to have been written by the Holy Spirit, who ‘dictated’ it to the human author, ‘and by the mouth of the writer handed down to us [Job’s] acts as patterns for our imitation’ (‘[...] *et per scribentis vocem imitanda ad nos ejus facta transmi[s]it*’).<sup>13</sup> The ‘causation whereby the divine *auctor* had directed the human *auctores* to write’<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953, 1990), p. 258.

<sup>10</sup> A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1988), p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. Minnis cites Gregory, *Moralia in Job, praefatio*, col. 517 A-B.

<sup>14</sup> Minnis, p. 28.

was vital to the way religious narrative was received. There existed inherent within the medieval idea of narrative the alluring possibility that 'authentic' texts could pass down to future generations something of the actuality of biblical, religious and historical events. This may relate to ultimate divine authorship of texts. It may also relate to the idea that the efficient cause, the *auctor*, himself participated in or witnessed divine events. In Conrad of Hirsau's *Dialogue on the Authors*, he says that 'the writer of history is said to write of the event he has witnessed.'<sup>15</sup>

*Auctoritas* is thus connected to the concept of 'witness', central to early Christian apologetics. Like *auctoritas*, witness can help establish the provenance of texts, ideas, people and events, thus giving them legitimacy and value. This concept of witness, however, implied not just having seen Christ, but also having converted and having adopted a Christian life. Christian martyrs, for example, were 'witnesses' for the faith; it was not that they themselves had seen Christ, but that they behaved like Christ, proving through their sacrifice the truth of Christ's sacrifice.<sup>16</sup> Origen, speaking of Christ's disciples, explains that a life lived in imitation of Christ can bear witness to the truth of a faith:

[Jesus] makes his defence in the lives of his genuine disciples, for their lives cry out the real facts and defeat all false charges, refuting and overthrowing the slanders and accusations.<sup>17</sup>

The disciples by their lives bear witness for Christ: this 'witness', this proof, is achieved by demonstration rather than by argument, but as Origen implies, the demonstration itself constitutes a form of argument.

This is also the function of miracles in the tales; miracles perform the persuasive function of rhetoric using events rather than words. To witness a miracle is to be given the opportunity of being converted by revelation, by direct experience, as opposed to being convinced by persuasive argument. The concepts of *auctoritas*, of witness and of miracle are connected in that they all relate to some direct experience, whether handed down through the medium of texts, related orally or

<sup>15</sup> Translation by R.B.C. Huygens, *Accessus ad auctores*, reproduced in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-c.1375*, ed. by A. J. Minnis and A.B. Scott (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. 'The Martyrdom of Polycarp', in which the translators note similarities of Polycarp's martyrdom to the Passion, notes 10, 11, 15 and 20, p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> *Contra Celsum*, praef. 2, p. 4.

experienced directly. The preservation and transmission of an authentic experience of the divine, or such an experience offered by a miraculous event, offers a way of getting back to an 'original' authentic truth. This is a reason why miracles often involve re-enactments of the pivotal events of Christian history, the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Jews themselves could be seen as links to original, authentic truths, perhaps following the example of Paul, who says:

I say then: Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin (Rom. 11. 1).

Jews were often depicted in legend as not having altogether forfeited their status as the possessors of the original and authentic Christian experience. In the 'Beirut' tale from the *Legenda*,<sup>18</sup> this idea of Jews as the original Christian 'witnesses' is stressed: the original painter of the image of Christ was one who had the opportunity to see Christ in the flesh. This resembles Conrad of Hirsau's concept of the *auctor* who records what he has witnessed. In this tale and at least one of the other *Legenda* narratives, as we shall see further on, the value of the Jews as witnesses related to the fact that some of the ancestors of contemporary Jews were portrayed as having seen Christ or having special knowledge of him, and to have passed down this knowledge among themselves. Like the bishop mentioned by Curtius who hoped to recover an oral tradition of Christ's teachings, the authors of the tales compiled in the *Legenda* assign Jews a special status as keepers of a tradition of Christ. Hence the importance of genealogies in certain of these tales: something vital could be handed down from the past, either orally, or by means of written narratives, or by means of an object authentically associated with Christ, like the True Cross or the Beirut icon.

Jewish genealogy is important in stories that emphasise the lineage of Christ. Part of early Christian polemics against the pagans consisted of establishing the right of Christ to be considered as a descendent of Jewish kings 'of the tribe of Judah and the royal stock of David' (*ex tribu Juda et regia stirpe David*), as Jacobus says.<sup>19</sup> This claim helped bolster the Christian contention that Christianity was a

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<sup>18</sup> *GL* II, p. 171; *LA*, pp. 608-9.

<sup>19</sup> *GL* II, p. 149; *LA*, p. 585.

continuation of the Jewish faith. In the *Legenda*, the chapter 'The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary' traces Mary's descent from David. Jacobus points out that Matthew and Luke give Joseph's lineage, even though he was not the father of Christ, rather than Mary's, because the authors of the gospels tended to give genealogies tracing the male line. Finding this unsatisfactory, however, since 'Christ was born of the Virgin alone' ('*Christus de sola virgine natus sit*'),<sup>20</sup> Jacobus traces Mary's descent from King David's son Nathan. Regarding Christ's lineage through Mary, patristic and medieval authors followed Isaiah 11. 1:

And there shall come forth a rod [Latin *virga*, associated with the Virgin] out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him [...].<sup>21</sup>

Justin remarks that Christ 'was conceived by a virgin of the seed of Jacob, who was the father of Judah, the father of the Jews [...] and Jesse was His forefather.'<sup>22</sup> As well as promising the kingdom of heaven to Christians, Christ was also seen to fulfil the Jewish hope of an earthly ruler who would usher in an age of plenty; the coming of the messiah was the return of a king of the blood of the kings of old.

Jacobus furthermore says that the knowledge of Israelite genealogies was preserved and hidden by the Jews:

We also find, in the *Ecclesiastical History* and in Bede's *Chronicle*, that all the genealogies of Hebrews and aliens were kept in the Temple's secret archives. Herod ordered the burning of these records, thinking that he might be able to pass himself off for a noble if, in the absence of proof to the contrary, he was thought to be Israelite by race. There were also some who were called *dominici* ('men of the Lord') because they were closely related to Christ and were from Nazareth. These *dominici* worked out, as well as they could, the order of Christ's human ancestry, partly from what they had learned from their forefathers and partly from some books that they had at home. (*Sicut autem in ecclesiastica hystoria dicitur et Beda in sua chronica testatur, cum omnes generationes Hebraeorum et alienigenarum in archivis*

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> For an examination of the 'Jesse root' theme in medieval Christian art, cf. Arthur Watson, *The Early Iconography of the tree of Jesse* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).

<sup>22</sup> Justin Martyr, 'The First Apology', in *Saint Justin Martyr: The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy or the Rule of God*, trans. by Thomas B. Falls, Fathers of the Church 6 (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1948), pp. 33-111 (32, p. 45).



*templi secretioribus servaventur, Herodes omnes jussit incendi, existimans se nobilem posse videri, si deficientibus probamentis progenies sua ad Israel pertinere crederetur. Fuerunt tamen quidam dicti dominici, sic dicti ob propinquitatem Christi, qui etiam Nazaraei fuerunt, qui ordinem generationis Christi partim, ut a proavis didicerant, partim, ut a quibusdam libris habuerunt, quos domi habebant, quantum poterant, perdocebant.)*<sup>23</sup>

This passage contains ideas that as we shall see, illuminate some of the tales concerning post-biblical Jews in the *Legenda*, and particularly the chapter entitled 'The Finding of the Holy Cross'. One is the idea of secret knowledge preserved by the Jews, knowledge pertaining to Christ, to which gentiles did not have access. Another is the importance of the Israelite lineage: Herod craves it because it may establish his nobility as it establishes Christ's messiahship. A third is that among the Jews certain people exist who are 'like' Christ in respect of lineage, and this gives them a kinship with him. Finally, Jews do not only preserve knowledge in books and archives but by direct transmission 'from their forefathers'. All of these revolve around the idea that some vital link with Christ remains in possession of the Jews, even in post-biblical times. This may owe something to St Paul's insistence that the gospel is 'the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first' (Rom. 1. 16). It may be because medieval Christian miracle tales retain some trace of these ideas that they sometimes portray proofs of Christianity as being revealed through miracles that are brought about by Jewish agency. Jacobus' chapter 'The Finding of the Holy Cross'<sup>24</sup> not only relates such a miracle, but also specifically uses the idea of secret Christian knowledge preserved by Jews.

<sup>23</sup> *GL* II, p. 150; *LA*, pp. 585-6.

<sup>24</sup> Earlier versions of the 'Finding' legend have been published; *The Finding of the True Cross: The Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac* is an edition and translation of 'the oldest extant Syriac text of the Kyriakos legend', from the MS Leningrad/Petersburg N.S. 4. In their introduction Drijvers and Drijvers state that the legend in its earliest forms dates from fourth-century Jerusalem, first written down in Greek by Gelasius of Caesaria c. 390 in the form called the 'Helena legend' by Straubinger. (Drijvers and Drijvers, pp. 12-13, citing J. Straubinger, *Die Kreuzauffindungslegende* (Paderborn, 1912), on the terminology (H)elena, P(rotonike) and K(yriakos) legends.) This early version does not feature helpful Jews, but has Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem, as the helper of Helena. (Jacobus also briefly cites this version as an alternate: *GL* I, 'Finding', p. 282; *LA*, 'De inventione', p. 309.) This version was 'translated by Rufinus into Latin and incorporated in the latter's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (10.7-8)'. The writers Ambrose, Paulinus of Nola, Sulpicius Severus, Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret later produced versions. (Drijvers and Drijvers, p. 13.) At points in his narrative Jacobus cites Ambrose (*de ob. Theod.*, *On the Death of Theodosius*, 40-49). Drijvers and Drijvers also cite the 'Protonike legend' (fifth century), only known in Syriac and Armenian, a 'local Edessene adaptation of the Helena legend', in which Helena is replaced by 'the fictitious empress Protonike'. They give the 'Judas Kyriakos legend,' upon which Jacobus' version is largely based, as an early fifth-century

Jacobus begins the chapter by relating the genealogy of the Cross, which derives from the 'tree of mercy' whose oil Adam's son Seth brought from Paradise to cure Adam ('*quod cum Adam infirmaretur, Seth filius ejus portas paradisi adiit et oleum ligni misericordiae, quo corpus patris perungeret et sanitatem reciperet*').<sup>25</sup> Jacobus cites a version in which Seth plants a branch from the tree over Adam's grave, and it grows into a tree ('*Qui rediens et patrem mortuum inveniens ipsum ramum super tumulum patris plantavit, qui plantatus in arborem magnam crevit*'). After the Crucifixion the Cross is 'hidden underground for over two hundred years' ('*Istud lignum crucis pretiosum per annos CC et ultra sub terra latuit*'). In the midst of a fierce battle, in some of Jacobus' sources against 'barbarians', in others against Maxentius<sup>26</sup>, the emperor Constantine experiences a vision of the sign of the cross 'formed in flaming light, with the legend "*In hoc signo vinces*" written in golden letters' ('*Qui in coelum adspiciens vidit signum crucis ex clarissimo lumine factum litteris aureis hunc titulum habens scriptum: in hoc signo vinces*'). He wins the victory, and later sends his mother Helena to Jerusalem to find the Cross. Jacobus recounts several versions of these events, in some of which the victory is won by Constantine's father. Having duly noted the alternates, Jacobus says that he prefers to follow Eusebius, whose account 'seems more authentic than the story usually read in the churches' ('*videtur esse magis authentica quam illa, quae per ecclesias recitatur*'). However, in his subsequent account of the actual finding of the cross, of which a paraphrase follows, he refers to more than one source text.

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variant. (Drijvers and Drijvers, p. 15.) Mark Edwards, however, whose *Constantine and Christendom* includes translations of a Greek and a Latin version of the 'Kyriakos legend', believes the 'Protonike' variant to be contemporaneous with the others (Edwards, p. xxxiii). The Greek and Latin versions Edwards translates are the editions of Holder, *Inventio Sanctae Crucis* (Leipzig, 1899), in the case of the Latin, with reference to the critical text edited by Borgehammar (Stephan Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross was Found* (Stockholm: Almqvis & Wiksell, 1991). Edwards cites evidence from Borgehammar showing passages where the Latin appears to be derived from a Greek source text (Edwards, p. xxxiv and cf. xxxix). For a review of *Constantine and Christendom* that is highly critical of Edwards and Borgehammar and supportive of Drijvers and Drijvers, cf. T. D. Barnes, 'Review. Constantine and Christendom. The Oration to the Saints. The Greek and Latin Accounts of the Discovery of the Cross. The Edict of Constantine to Pope Silvester.' *Journal of Theological Studies* 55 (2004), 351-5. For a detailed comparison of sources and analogues of the legend, cf. Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 79-188.

<sup>25</sup> This and the following paragraphs summarise Jacobus' chapter 'The Finding of the Holy Cross,' *GL* I, pp. 277-284; *LA*, pp. 303-11.

<sup>26</sup> Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maxentius, brother-in-law of Constantine and a rival for the imperial title. In 312 Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Battle of Milvian Bridge made Constantine ruler over the Western portion of the Roman empire.

In Jerusalem, Helena summons a group of Jewish scholars to help her. One of them, named Judas, advises the others against doing so, for if they do, 'you can be absolutely sure that our Law will be annulled and the traditions of the fathers completely wiped out' (*'certissime sciatis, quod lex nostra evacuabitur et paternae traditiones funditus destruentur'*). He recounts a conversation with his father, who has warned him that the Christians would come looking for Christ's cross, and that he was not to disclose its whereabouts to them. This was partly for fear that he would be tortured, but partly because 'from then on the Jewish nation will never reign, for those who adore the Crucified will rule, because Christ was indeed the Son of God' (*'nusquam enim extunc gens Judaeorum regnabit, sed illi, qui crucifixum adorant, quia ipse Christus filius Dei erat'*). Judas asks his father why, if their ancestors knew this, they nailed him to the Cross. His father replies that he himself 'was never in their counsels and often spoke against them' (*'nunquam in consilio eorum exstiti, sed iis saepius contradixi'*), but that the crucifixion was the revenge of the Pharisees for Christ's condemnation of their vices. The father acknowledges the truth of the resurrection and adds, 'my brother Stephen believed in him and the Jews in their madness stoned him to death' (*'In quem Stephanus frater meus credidit, quem Judaeorum vesania lapidavit'*).

After hearing this, the other Jews are surprised, but counsel Judas to say nothing to Helena. She then threatens the Jews with death by fire, whereupon they hand Judas over to her, telling her that he is 'the son of a just man and a prophet' (*'justi et prophetae filius'*) who is learned in the Law and can answer her questions. She charges him to reveal the location of Golgotha, and he replies that he does not know it, since 'more than two hundred years have gone by since then!' (*'ducenti anni jam et amplius fluxerint'*). She swears 'by the Crucified' (*'per crucifixum'*) to starve Judas to death, and has him cast into a 'dry well' (*'in puteum siccum'*) and starved for seven days, whereupon he agrees to lead her to the site (*'Cum ergo ibidem VI diebus sine cibo mansisset, die septimo extrahi petiit'*). After being lifted out he goes to the place and prays (*'ad locum venisset et ibidem orasset'*), whereupon the earth quakes and 'a mist of sweet-smelling perfume greet[s] their senses' (*'locus subito commovetur et fumus aromatum miri odoris sentitur'*). Judas exclaims in wonder, 'In truth, O Christ, you are the Saviour of the world!' (*'in veritate, Christe, tu es salvator'*).

*mundi*'). The site is occupied by a temple of Venus 'which Hadrian had built so that any Christians who came to pray there would seem to be adoring Venus' ('*quod Hadrianus imperator ibidem construxerat, ut, si quis christianorum in loco illo adorare voluisset, videretur Venerem adorare*'). Helena has the temple destroyed and Judas digs down 'twenty yards' and finds three buried crosses ('*Post hoc Judas praecingens se viriliter fodere coepit et XX passus fodiens tres cruces absconditas reperit*'). When these are dug up they are taken to the city, and Judas interrupts a funeral procession to hold the crosses over the corpse, the True Cross reviving the dead man.

Here Jacobus gives two further versions of this part of the story, the first of which can be read 'in the histories of the Church', ('*In hystoriis [...] ecclesiasticis*') in which Macarius, the bishop of Jerusalem, similarly revives a woman by means of the Cross. The second, for which he cites 'Ambrose', describes how Pilate's superscription identifies the Cross. When it is read, the devil appears and screams reproaches at Judas for unearthing the Cross, contrasting him with 'my Judas' ('*Judae meo,*' i.e., Judas Iscariot), who betrayed Christ and by whose means many souls were gained for the devil, only to be lost again through the actions of the present Judas. The devil threatens to raise up another king, who 'will abandon the faith of the Crucified and by torture will make you deny the Crucified!' ('*qui fidem deserens crucifixi cum tormentis te negare faciet crucifixum*'). Jacobus, possibly following Ambrose, notes that this probably refers to Julian the Apostate, who later opposes Judas.

Following the identification of the Cross, Judas is baptised and given the name 'Quiriacus'.<sup>27</sup> He is later ordained bishop of Jerusalem. At Helena's request, Quiriacus returns to the site where the Cross was found to search for the nails with which Christ was crucified. He prays 'profusely', and the nails appear on the ground 'gleaming like gold' ('*Qui cum venisset et ad dominum preces fudisset, continuo velut aurum clavi fulgentes in terra apparuerunt*'). Helena brings the nails, along with a piece of the Cross, to her son Constantine. Again Jacobus' sources vary: he cites Eusebius of Caesaria as saying that one of the nails was made into 'a bit for [Constantine's] war bridle', and the others 'welded into his helmet' ('*clavos vero [...]*

<sup>27</sup> 'Quiriacus' is from the Syriac *Kyriakos*, 'he who belongs to the Lord' (Drijvers and Drijvers, pp. 11-12).

*ex quibus [...] frenos, quibus uteretur ad bellum, composuit et ex aliis galeam suam armavit*'). But Jacobus also notes the version of Gregory of Tours, in which there are four nails, of which two are put into the bridle, one is 'fixed [...] into the statue of Constantine that dominates the city of Rome', and the last thrown into the Adriatic where it calms a whirlpool (*'clavos quatuor in dominico corpore fuisse, ex quibus Helena duos in freno imperatoris posuit, tertium in imagine Constantini, qui Romae supereminet urbi, locavit et quartum in mare Adriaticum, quod usque tunc fuerat navigantium vorago, projecit [...]'*). Jacobus cites 'Ambrose' on the meaning of these events: 'Helena sought the Lord's nails and found them, and had one of them made into a bit and the other worked into the royal crown: it was right that the nail be on the head, the crown at the top, the bridle in the hand, so that the mind should be preeminent, the faith should shine forth, and the royal power should rule'. (*'Quaesivit Helena clavos domini et invenit et de uno frenos fieri praecepit, de altero dyadema intexuit: recte clavus in capite, corona in vertice et in manu habena, ut sensus praeemineat, fides luceat, potestas regat.'*) Helena then institutes the feast of the Holy Cross.

Jacobus' account of the finding of the Cross closes with the further adventures of Quiriacus. Julian the Apostate orders that Quiriacus' right hand be cut off, for 'with that hand you wrote many letters recalling many people from the cult of the gods' (*'hac manu multas epistolas scripsit, quibus multos a Deorum sacrificiis revocavit*'). Quiriacus replies, 'You are doing me a favour, you rabid dog, because before I believed in Christ, I often wrote letters to the Jewish synagogues to dissuade everyone from believing in Christ, and now you have cut this scandal from my body.' (*'multum mihi, canis insensate, profuisti, quia priusquam in Christum crederem, saepius ad synagogas Judaeorum scribebam epistolas, ut nullus in Christum crederet, et ecce nunc scandalum mei corporis abscidisti*'). Refusing first to sacrifice to the gods and then to renounce Christ, Quiriacus is put to death with tortures. With this, Jacobus ends his main narrative, and closes his chapter with an anecdote concerning a young notary who refuses to deny Christ and vanquishes a troupe of demons by making the sign of the cross.

In this chapter, the genealogy of the True Cross links Adam's sin with Christ's redemption, thus portraying the Cross as an integral part of Biblical history



as far back as Eden. The inclusion of the origin story emphasises that the Cross has power over those evils that resulted from the Fall, sin and death, but that continue to threaten the members of the Christian community, or corpus Christi. The didactic function of the legend could be to foster an awareness that the threat of sin and the promise of redemption are both relevant, not only in the Biblical past, but also in the reader's present. Narratives about the Cross show the importance of the Cross in Christian history, but also remind medieval readers of the possibility of personally invoking the power of the Cross as an aid in avoiding sin and seeking redemption: this theme helped link the disparate sections of Jacobus' chapter, 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross', discussed in Chapter Three.

As far as Christian history is concerned, the 'Finding' legend is an accretion of myths surrounding definitive moments in the formation of the Roman Christian empire. In this context, the political rather than personal aspect of the power of the cross is emphasised; manifested as a sign in the heavens, it grants Constantine victory in battle. Here the image of Christ militant is evoked. The outcomes of Constantine's miraculous vision are, first a military victory that establishes his right to the imperial throne, and then the eventual transformation of Rome under a Christian emperor from a merely temporal power into a spiritual kingdom. Thus, the opening of Jacobus' chapter shows that the cross is able to vanquish not only personal and original sin but also earthly foes and the enemies of Christendom.<sup>28</sup>

Yet one group of Christ's foes, the Jews, who, having rejected Christ, live in sin without the hope of redemption, are not pictured in this tale as being vanquished by the power of the cross. The Jewish scholars consulted by Helena are mostly ignorant of events concerning the Cross. However, Judas is shown to have special knowledge, handed down from his father. He knows the location of the cross. He has also been told by his father that 'Christ [is] indeed the Son of God'. He has been charged to keep this knowledge secret, lest it prevent the Jewish nation from ever ruling. All of this presents similar ideas to those found in 'The Birth of the Blessed

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<sup>28</sup> cf. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, p. 182: 'The Cross protects the Christian emperor like a *phylaktèrion*, but it serves also as a *tropaeum*, a representation of the heavenly alliance between the emperor and the Christian God. The *tropaeum* may help to defeat enemies, religious enemies like Jews and pagans, as well as the enemy on the battlefield. The Cross provides a *triumphus* for the emperor as well as for Christianity.' Drijvers here follows Rufinus, 'Exposition Symboli' 12 in *Tyrannii Rufini, Opera*, CCSL 20, p. 149: '*Unde sciendum est quod crux ista triumphus erat: triumphi enim insigne est tropaeum; tropaeum autem devicti hostis indicium est*'.



Virgin Mary', (see above) in which Hebrew genealogies (by implication probably revealing the descent of Christ from the Davidic line) are kept secret in Jewish archives, and certain Jews can trace a familial relationship with Christ, according to books and to information handed down by their 'forefathers'. Both tales make use of the idea that amongst the Jews are some who bear a special relationship to Christ or to the cross. From the Jewish milieu in which Christ lived and died, a secret knowledge pertaining to the cross and hidden from the Gentiles and from other Jews has been passed down by the group that holds it. It is thus amidst a Jewish context that the hidden cross may once again reveal itself. Even the spiritual understanding of Christian believers cannot here compete with the position of the Jews as the original target of Christ's ministry and the historical witnesses of his life and death.

Yet only certain amongst the Jews retain the secret knowledge. Judas' father presents himself as one who opposed the Crucifixion, in contrast to the Pharisees, who plotted Christ's death in vengeance for his rebukes. He also claims that Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is his brother. Thus he links himself with the earliest Christian initiates to emerge within Judaism. The theme of a secret tradition, known to initiates, in early Christianity has been treated by Margaret Barker, whose discussion will be followed here, with some additions from other scholars.<sup>29</sup> The 'initiate' theme may derive in part from the mysticisms of older traditions, like those of Judaism. N. R. M. de Lange, writing of the transmission of the Torah in Jewish tradition, says that 'an unbroken chain of tradition was seen to join the revelation of the whole Torah, written and oral, at Sinai to the rabbis themselves'.<sup>30</sup> The idea of initiation also emerges in Neo-Platonic and Gnostic branches of Christianity.<sup>31</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of 'the kind of divine enlightenment into which we have been initiated by the hidden tradition of our inspired teachers, a tradition at one with

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Margaret Barker, 'The Secret Tradition', *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 2 (1995), pp. 31-67, revised version <http://www.marquette.edu/maqom/tradition1> [accessed 07.06.06], esp. p. 31, and *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (Edinburgh: Clark, 2000), pp. 3-4.

<sup>30</sup> N. R. M. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture, A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, 2 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), pp. 139-56.

Scripture'.<sup>32</sup> According to Barker, 'For several centuries a belief persisted among Christian writers that there had been a secret tradition entrusted to only a few of his followers'.<sup>33</sup> Eusebius quotes Clement of Alexandria as saying that three of the apostles received 'the higher knowledge' from Christ, passing it on to the other apostles, who transmitted it in their turn.<sup>34</sup> Origen said that 'Jesus [...] is said to have spoken the Word of God to his disciples privately, and especially in places of retreat', and that 'it did not seem to them that these matters ought to be described at some length or orally for the masses'. This suggests a prohibition on preaching the material openly, and Origen speculates that the disciples knew what truths should and should not be written down.<sup>35</sup>

Origen also connected the idea of hidden knowledge explicitly with the Jews of the Old Testament, saying that 'Our prophets [...] had certain truths in their minds that were too exalted to be written down and which they did not record'.<sup>36</sup> Jean Daniélou says that one of Origen's 'sources of secret Jewish and Judaeo-Christian doctrines' is 'apocalyptic literature [...] esoteric writings not made available to all', such as the *Book of Jubilees*, which, in Origen's eyes 'contained secret Jewish traditions'.<sup>37</sup> Of Jews as portrayed in the New Testament, Origen writes,

We must say [...] to those who listen carefully and on a deeper level to what the Jews say in the Gospels, that it is obvious that they made many remarks in accordance with secret and esoteric traditions, as if they knew things other than those that were common and trite.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, 'On the Divine Names', in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. by Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 49-131 (592B, p. 52). Cited in Barker, 'The Secret Tradition', p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, citing the *Ecclesiastical History* 2.1. Cf. *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Kirsopp Lake (I) and J. E. L. Oulton (II), ed. by H. J. Lawler, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, London: Heinemann, 1926, 1975, I, 1932, 1973, II), II, 2.1, p.105, in which Eusebius cites Clement's (now lost) *Hypotyposes*, 6: ' "After the Resurrection the Lord gave the tradition of knowledge to James the Just and John and Peter, these gave it to the other Apostles and the other Apostles to the seventy [...]" '

<sup>35</sup> *Contra Celsum*, 6.6, p. 320.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. This and the two previous Origen quotations are cited in a different translation in Barker, *Revelation*, p. 3 (one quotation is wrongly attributed as *Contra Celsum*, 6.23).

<sup>37</sup> *Gospel Message*, p. 488.

<sup>38</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Fathers of the Church 80 and 89, 2 vols (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1989-1993), II (1993), 19.92, p. 189. Barker (*Revelation*, p. 4) cites (without attribution) Daniélou's translation (*Gospel Message*, p. 493) of this quotation (cited as *On John* 1.31; the inaccurate citation is reproduced from Daniélou).

The 'Finding' story shows that echoes or analogues of these Patristic traditions of Jewish and apostolic initiates survived to appear in fifth-century and later Christian legend as the idea that a secret knowledge persisted amongst the Jewish descendents of Christ's earliest followers.

This concept, as mentioned above in connection with Jacobus' 'Finding' and 'Exaltation' chapters, constitutes something like a doctrine of Jewish 'witness' that is distinct from the Augustinian concept of Jewish witness. It relates to the Jews as bearers of secret knowledge of Christ transmitted from their forefathers, rather than, as in Augustine, to the Jews as bearers of scriptures containing the prophecies of Christ. Another passage from Margaret Barker helps to illuminate the basis of this distinction:

It is important to note that the secret tradition was not written down. Eusebius implies that Clement did write it down, even though Origen [...] was always reticent about committing it to writing. 'Clement', wrote Eusebius, 'in his work on the Pascha declares that his friends insisted on his transmitting to later generations in writing the oral traditions that had come down to him from the earliest authorities of the church' (*History* 6.13).<sup>39</sup>

Here we see direct, oral transmission valued in the same way as it is in Curtius' story of the bishop Papias, cited above. However, this 'secret tradition', even if it began amongst the earliest Jewish followers of Christ, belongs essentially to the Christian sect. Thus, what we see in the 'Finding,' in which a Jew retains the memory of a pro-Christian sect to which his ancestors belonged, is a different phenomenon from the involuntary 'witness' that Augustine attributed to the Jews of his time, whom he saw as the bearers of writings that held a spiritual Christian meaning that the Jews themselves did not understand. In contrast to Augustine, the idea of a Jewish-Christian initiatory tradition could imply some level of understanding, since the idea of initiation itself encompasses both the desire to be initiated and an understanding, communicated through 'direct' experience or transmission, possibly of a revelatory nature, of the secret teachings.

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<sup>39</sup> *Revelation*, p. 4, citing the *Ecclesiastical History*, II, 6.13, pp. 45-6: 'And in [Clement's] book *On the Pascha* he professes that he was compelled by his companions to commit to writing traditions that he had heard from the elders of olden time, for the benefit of those that should come after [...]'

This direct experience also confers authority. Elaine Pagels connects the infrastructure of the Church, based on apostolic succession, with the eleven apostles' experience of seeing the resurrected Christ, so that leadership of the Church is restricted to 'a small band of persons whose members stand in a position of incontestable authority [...] only the apostles had the right to ordain future leaders as their successors'.<sup>40</sup> Pagels points out that this authority, derived from direct experience, can never be matched or contested: 'what the apostles experienced and attested their successors cannot verify for themselves; instead, they must only believe, protect and hand down to future generations the apostles' testimony.'<sup>41</sup> The 'Finding of the Holy Cross' places Jews, or a sect of Jewish Christians, in a similar position of authority: only they can retrieve the True Cross.

Yet the position of the Jews in Jacobus' 'Finding,' even that of Judas and his father, heirs of the secret tradition, is not quite so clear-cut. They occupy an unstable territory somewhere in between the authority of the apostles and the involuntary witness proposed by Augustine. When Judas tells the other Jews about his father's knowledge of Christ, they are bemused rather than enraged. They counsel Judas to say nothing, but this might be taken as prudence (as seen in the fear of torture expressed by Judas' father) rather than overt hostility. On the other hand, Judas' father counsels silence also because, if the truth about Christ were made public, the Jews could never 'reign', because 'Christ was indeed the Son of God.' Thus, while Judas' father knows that Christ is the Son of God, and that he was resurrected, he still wishes this knowledge to be suppressed. Judas wishes the same; otherwise 'our Law will be annulled and the traditions of the fathers completely wiped out' ('*si non autem, certissime sciatis, quod lex nostra evacuabitur et paternae traditiones funditus destruentur*').<sup>42</sup> This wish to conceal Christian truth in order to hold out hope of eventual Jewish dominance over 'those who adore the Crucified', seems like a depiction of Jews as inimical to Christians. Yet Judas' father is careful to distance himself from the 'Pharisees', for he 'was never in their counsels' and opposed the Crucifixion. Thus, a group of hostile Jews of the most extreme kind, deicidal plotters, is contrasted with Judas' father, who 'often spoke against them'.

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<sup>40</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 41.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *GL* I, p. 281; *LA*, p. 307.

Other versions of the legend problematise the Jews' position even more. Jan Willem Drijvers considers that in the Cyriacus or Kyriakos legend (of which Jacobus' version is a variant) 'it is obvious that [Helena] holds the Jews responsible for hiding the Cross'; he cites the end of some texts of the Protonike version in which 'the Jews deprived the Bishop of Jerusalem of the Cross and buried it'.<sup>43</sup> Here the Jews intentionally deprive Christians of the Cross, and their secret knowledge appears in an inimical light. The Latin and Greek versions translated by Mark Edwards have Helena repeatedly and at some length citing both Old and New Testaments to the effect that the Jews are a blind and foolish people who rejected and abused Christ.<sup>44</sup> Here the secret tradition of Jewish knowledge is seen to have been preserved within a context of Jewish ignorance and hostility.

Thus, in these versions, Jewish ignorance and Jewish knowledge seem to exist side by side. Helena insists on demanding the whereabouts of the Cross from only those Jews 'who have diligently learned the knowledge of the Law',<sup>45</sup> which seems all the stranger since these texts also emphasise the blindness of those who still follow the Law. This use of the term 'the Law' reflects the ambiguity with which early and medieval Christianity regarded it, as being at once the authoritative sign of the chosen people, and an outmoded form whose preservation signified the spiritual ignorance of its continued adherents. Additionally, in these texts 'the Law' seems to stand for the secret tradition of Jewish Christians, equating Jewish learning ultimately with Christian knowledge. Yet the Jewish secret tradition can also be obstructive and damaging, as evidenced by their desire to conceal the whereabouts of the Cross. The essential ambiguities are also present in Jacobus' text, but with less stress on Jewish ignorance. In all versions, however, Judas and his father enjoy an uneasy status, at once representative of a tradition suggestive of Jewish Christian initiation, and representative of the defenders of the Old Law against the Christian incursion.

The theme of tradition and transmission of knowledge makes the 'Finding' tale significantly different from some of the icon-desecration tales we have looked at. An exception is the 'Beirut' tale discussed in Chapter Three. In both of these tales

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<sup>43</sup> *Helena Augusta*, p. 177.

<sup>44</sup> *Constantine and Christendom*, pp. 67-9 and pp. 82-3.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9.



‘direct transmission’, whether of sacred knowledge or of a sacred object, is an important theme. The provenance of the image painted by Nicodemus in the ‘Exaltation’ may be what gives this image its special distinction: the miracle of the blood that emanates from it prompts a ‘commemoration of the Lord’s passion’, the consecration of a church and the observance there of ‘a solemn feast’. The True Cross is similarly singled out for its sacred quality, derived from contact with the physical body of Christ, and from having been the means by which the redemption of man was achieved. Although any image of the cross had power, a peculiar sanctity is conferred on fragments of the True Cross, which according to the ‘Finding’ legend had figured so immediately in the story in Genesis, as well as its role in the Crucifixion.

Despite making use of the idea of knowledge handed down through the generations in historical time, however, the ‘Finding’ tale’s sense of time is not naturalistic. As with the story of the image painted by Nicodemus, the chronology of the transmission of the secret knowledge, as related in the ‘Finding’, is an impossible one. Judas’ father speaks as if he himself had been Christ’s contemporary, and identifies his brother, Judas’ uncle, as St Stephen. Earlier Syriac versions of this legend make Judas’ great-grandfather the brother of Stephen, but even so, the chronology is inaccurate.<sup>46</sup> Jacobus, evidently without knowledge of the extended chronology of earlier versions of the legend, is troubled by the temporal anomaly, noting that ‘from that time [of Christ’s Passion] to Helena’s, when this Judas is supposed to have told his story, more than 270 years had elapsed – unless, perhaps, it could be said that men lived longer than they do now’ (*‘a passione Christi usque ad Helenam, sub qua Judas fuit, fluxerint plus quam ducenti septuaginta anni, nisi forte*

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<sup>46</sup> The references to Judas’ father having been Stephen’s brother probably reflect later alterations to the earliest Syriac versions of the ‘Judas Kyriakos’ legend, in which it is Judas’ grandfather or great-grandfather who is the brother of St Stephen. The editors of the Syriac legend give ‘grandfather’; but if Judas’ father is speaking, as he appears to be, when he says Stephen was the ‘brother of the father of my father’, then it is his grandfather, and Judas’ great-grandfather, who is Stephen’s brother. In these early versions, it is ‘our forefathers’ who ‘were never accomplices of the crucifiers’, rather than Judas’ father. (Drijvers and Drijvers, pp. 60-1.) However, since St Stephen flourished in the first century after Christ, and Helena died c.329, even reckoning three generations after Stephen, we come up short of the probable date of the setting of the ‘Finding’ myths (The historical Helena travelled to Palestine in 327-28). The version used by Jacobus, which compresses the time-scale even more, sets the experiences of Judas’ father in mythic time. He is both a contemporary of Christ, having opposed the Pharisees in the matter of the Crucifixion, and of Stephen; since Stephen’s dates cannot be accurately known, this is possible, but it appears to be another instance of temporal foreshortening.



*diceretur, quod tunc homines plus quam modo vivebant*').<sup>47</sup> However, the telescoping of time in Jacobus' version creates a powerful sense of 'mythic' time, reinforcing the sense that Judas represents the Jew according to Augustine's topos of *testimonium veritatis*. Even if the logic of the plot suffers, the technique of the conflation of past and present is a device that adds drama and emotive force.

Furthermore, the delineation of a special relationship between past and present is essential to typological interpretation, and thus to the medieval Christian understanding of history. A typological understanding encompasses a view of Christian history *sub specie aeternitatis*. God's will can enter the realm of the temporal from the realm of the eternal, and create early events that foreshadow later ones, so that, for example, the story of Isaac and Abraham prefigures the sacrifice of the son of God. In the 'Finding', the Jews, or that segment of them represented by Judas and his father, act as a narrative device to bring the past, and most importantly the time of the Crucifixion, into the tale's 'present', the time of the emperor Constantine.

By means of this approach, the Christianisation of Rome is made, in the terminology of the four exegetical 'senses', a part of allegorical (Christian, spiritual) as well as literal (chronological, temporal) history. But the allegorical sense does not overshadow the literal sense in this tale; rather, they support one another. In political terms, the cause of Constantine against Maxentius is endorsed by the portion of the tale relating to Constantine's vision. The legend both legitimates the Christian sect by associating it with Constantine's political and military successes, and endows Constantine's rule with Christian spiritual significance. The narrative employs a basic but vivid symbolism in its account of the nails from the Cross being welded into the military accoutrements of Constantine, his war-bridle and helmet, or in the version attributed to Ambrose, 'worked into the royal crown'. Another version cited by Jacobus has a nail being incorporated into 'the statue of Constantine that dominates the city of Rome'.<sup>48</sup> These images show Constantine assuming the mantle of Christ, ruling over a realm in which ideals of the heavenly and of the earthly city are symbolically joined.

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<sup>47</sup> *GL* I, p. 282; *LA*, p. 308.

<sup>48</sup> *GL* I, p. 283.

Not only does the tale highlight Constantine's role in the founding of the Roman Church; the founding of a specific church in Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, is also supported by the myth of the unearthing of the Cross on the site where it was built. Jacobus does not cite, but is likely to have had in mind, Eusebius' account of how the Church was built by Constantine on the site of Golgotha, and how the builders uncovered Christ's tomb.<sup>49</sup> Drijvers and Drijvers, editors of the early Syriac 'Judas Kyriakos' legend, give a glimpse of what one political motivation for the early dissemination of the 'Finding' tale may have been. They have contextualised the tale in terms of fourth-century church politics in Palestine, saying that it may have been used, though not originally written, with a view to establishing the supremacy of the (orthodox) see of Jerusalem over that of the (Arian-leaning) see of Caesarea.<sup>50</sup> Mark Edwards, however, citing the omission of Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem and the inclusion of 'Eusebius, bishop of Rome', as the baptiser of Constantine in the versions he translates, argues that 'the author of the *Inventio* had two objects – to chasten the pretensions of Jerusalem and to augment the dignity of the Roman see'.<sup>51</sup> Whatever role the legend may have played in early rivalries between the bishoprics of Jerusalem, Caesarea and Rome, it is unlikely that these details of fourth-century ecclesiastical politics would have been relevant to the majority of the tale's thirteenth to fifteenth-century Western European readers. However, even to a late-medieval readership for whom these events lay in the distant past, and for whom neither early church politics nor the defence of a

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<sup>49</sup> Eusebius, 'The Life of Constantine', in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, 1 (Oxford, Parker, 1890), pp. 466-559 (3.25-30, pp. 526-28.) Also cf. Drijvers on why Eusebius mentions the tomb of Christ but not Golgotha or the discovery of the Cross; *Helena Augusta*, pp. 83-9.

<sup>50</sup> 'Drijvers [*Helena Augusta*, pp. 140-42] maintains that the story of Helena's *Inventio Crucis* is historical fiction, arguing that only in the second half of the fourth century Helena was [sic] connected with the discovery of the Cross, and that Cyril, the bishop of Jerusalem, had invested a major political interest in the legend in his struggle with the metropolitan of Caesarea for supremacy in the Church province of Palestine. The legend may therefore be considered as a piece of propaganda to obtain metropolitan rights for the see of Jerusalem. This is not to say that the legend was originally constructed as a propagandistic treatise, but that the story which arose to explain to pilgrims the presence of the *lignum crucis* in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, was applied as such.' Drijvers and Drijvers, pp. 18-19. For a detailed account, cf. *Helena Augusta*, pp. 131-42.

<sup>51</sup> Edwards, pp. xxxviii-xxxix, citing the 'grievance' borne by 'the whole of the west' towards Jerusalem after 415, when the bishop favoured the Pelagian heresy. Jacobus cites alternate histories of the conversion of Constantine, noting that some sources give St Silvester as the baptiser of Constantine, another 'the bishop of Caesarea' and others 'Pope Saint Eusebius' (*GL* I, p. 279; *LA*, pp. 305-06).

minority faith against the pagans were topical issues, the tale would have had the appeal of epic in depicting events that helped to establish the Christian era.

What is particularly notable about the 'Finding' tale for present purposes, of course, is not merely that this pivotal event, the establishment of Christian Rome, is spiritually legitimised by the recovery of the Cross, but that the recovery of the Cross itself is brought about by means of the Jewish act of witness. Not only does the Cross emerge triumphantly from the earth to herald the birth of a new era: Judas the Jew himself undergoes burial, emergence and transformation as part of the process of his discovery. At the start of the tale Judas is an ambiguous figure. He is not hostile or aggressive in the manner of the Jewish characters discussed in Chapter Three. He is, however, resistant to telling Helena what he knows, because he is concerned that the secret knowledge threatens the continuation of the Jewish religion. When questioned by Helena, even though she has previously threatened him and his colleagues with death by fire, he claims ignorance, and only relents after being thrown into 'a dry well' and given no food for six days. He is thus far depicted as a somewhat unwilling guardian of the secret, who has been told of its truth, and who expresses no doubt on the subject, but whose spiritual affiliation to the Old Law has not been altered by the knowledge. Later, in his new identity as the bishop Quiriacus, he admits in a letter to having formerly often written 'letters to the Jewish synagogues to dissuade everyone from believing in Christ'.

The prayer which Judas offers up prior to the discovery of the Cross demonstrates that he retains aspects of this ambiguous status even after agreeing to locate the Cross and being allowed to emerge from the well. It is not clear whether Judas can still be considered to be a Jew at this point in the story, or whether he has already undergone the experience of conversion. Jacobus does not give details of Judas' prayer, but more detail is given in one of the older texts of the legend, the Latin version of the tale translated by Mark Edwards.<sup>52</sup> This version transcribes the prayer, not only in translation (i.e., in Latin, in the original, rendered by Edwards into English), but in spurious Hebrew as well. Edwards comments that the translated

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<sup>52</sup> *Constantine and Christendom*, pp. 63-80.

prayer, which invokes the angelic hierarchies, has been connected with Christian ideas about Jewish magic.<sup>53</sup> The 'Hebrew' prayer is rendered as follows:

Aisaarabrimilas/filomabon.achuiroiloemlemetdochzod/  
failemfaudiubariccataadonaheluielecanro/  
abraxioetadalbarucadtamdextrambuzima/  
tuccatadavidauiatherahelbememonsegen/  
geminiihem.<sup>54</sup>

Certainly, the 'Hebrew' version (which has line but not word divisions), even if meaningless overall, contains recognisable elements of Hebrew prayer. Despite Edwards' comment that the prayer 'never invokes the names of Iao and Adonai'<sup>55</sup> is correct if it refers to the Latin prayer, but does not apply to the Hebrew prayer, which seems to invoke both. The sequence 'abraxio', for example, may be compared to 'Io Abrasax', one similar form found in real magical incantations of late antiquity.<sup>56</sup> The reference is to 'Abraxas' or 'Abrasax', a Gnostic deity worshipped by the second-century Basilides, who is often conflated with Iao, the trigrammaton Iota Alpha Omega, the earliest Greek form of the Hebrew name of God and thus also connected with 'Adonai' (Hebrew 'Lord').<sup>57</sup> The prayer also contains the sequence 'bariccataadonahelu', which, broken up into 'baricc ata adonah elu', can be seen to be an only slightly corrupt partial transliteration of the beginning of the standard prefix to blessings in Hebrew, '*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam*', 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord Our God, King of the Universe'. Elsewhere in the prayer is another 'baruchadta' as well as the name 'David'.

Thus far, in this version at least, Judas' prayer, while nonsensical,<sup>58</sup> seems intended to incorporate some Hebrew and be recognisably the prayer of a Jew.

<sup>53</sup> 'Knowledge of the nomenclature of angels is a precondition of efficacious magic in both Jewish and Gnostic literature.' *Constantine and Christendom*, p. 74, n. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73, n. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Occurring, for example, on a papyrus from Egypt, 2<sup>nd</sup> century A. D., Special Collections Library, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, MI, PMich 3, 156 (=inv. 1463) = PGM LXIX

<sup>57</sup> 'The names of Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai, Eloai belong to the God of the Hebrews. Iao Sabaoth represents "JHVH (Jahweh)." Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), p. 134.

<sup>58</sup> On nonsense in medieval Jewish magical incantations, cf. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), pp. 81-2.

However, the prayer as given in Latin (in English translation in Edwards) has shows strong evidence of Christian belief. Judas asks God to send a miracle

if it is thy will that the son of Mary should reign – and had he not been from thee he could not have done such works of power, and had he not indeed been thy Son thou wouldst not have raised him again from the dead – give us therefore, God, a miracle [...] cause to ascend from that same place the smoke of the aromatic odour of sweetness, that I may believe in the crucified Christ...<sup>59</sup>

Yet Old Testament imagery is also present. Edwards points out, following Borgehammar, the resemblance of the Latin prayer to prayer sequences from the Old Testament, for example in II Kings 19. 15-19, and mentions the ‘imagery of sacrifice’ in the phrase ‘the smoke of the aromatic odour of sweetness’.<sup>60</sup> The reference to aromatic smoke, insofar as it evokes the idea of sacrificial offering, links Judas both with the Temple sacrifices and with the sacrifice of Christ that for Christians puts an end to the custom of animal sacrifice (also evoked in Jacobus’ description of the pond covering the burial place of the sacred wood, in which sacrificial animals were cleansed). With regard to the status of Judas at the moment of his prayer, there is also the question of whether (in any version) his conversion is dated from his emergence from the pit, at which point he is willing to pray for the Cross to be found, or from his ‘sense of wonder’ and acceptance of Christ following the miracle. If the latter is the case, which would fit in with the miracle-tale pattern of Jewish conversion following a miracle, then his prayers, although they may be ‘Christian’ in intent, can still be considered the prayers of a Jew.

As we can see, there is a grey area here regarding the conversion of Judas; tales depicting non-hostile Jews, like the ‘Nicholas’ and ‘Exaltation’ tales, often depict elements of ‘conversion’ or ‘initiation’ behaviour pre-miracle. Despite the fact that we have said that the ‘direct transmission’ theme is different from Augustine’s concept of Jewish witness, the description of Judas here resembles that of a Jew who is useful in Augustinian terms. Judas here reminds us of Augustine’s concept of the Jews who, while their scriptural knowledge makes them ‘desks for the Christians’,<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Constantine and Christendom*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73, n. 3, pp. 74-5, n. 1.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Reply to Faustus’, 12.23, p. 191.



have, in Christian terms, no spiritual understanding of their encoded prophetic message referring to the advent of Christ. While Judas has a literal understanding of his father's words regarding Christ, no revelatory experience has instilled in him Christian faith.

Following his emergence from the well, however, Judas ceases to be resistant. He prays at the location of the Cross, and this triggers two miraculous signs, an earthquake and a perfumed mist. The narrative here describes Judas as 'filled with wonder' (*'miratus'*), and he exclaims, 'In truth, O Christ, you are the Saviour of the world!' He digs 'twenty yards' to find the three crosses, and he is later the one to perform the tests that distinguish the True cross from the thieves' crosses. He accepts Christian baptism, becomes a bishop, and finds Christ's nails by means of prayer, followed by another miracle when the nails surface by themselves, gleaming brightly.

From occupying a somewhat imprecise place on a hostile-benign continuum, being neither aggressive towards Christianity nor professing it, and preserving its secrets while adhering to his own faith, Judas has become a believer. Like many other miracle tales involving Jews, the 'Finding' is a conversion narrative, with the moment of conversion following the first miraculous signs. Judas is described as being internally moved to awe. His utterance, 'In truth, O Christ, you are the Saviour of the world!' is similar to the cry 'Great is the God of the Christians!' with which pagan observers greeted Christian miracles in early texts, as discussed in Chapter Three. It is the unmistakable outward sign of his conversion, a declaration of faith. His later Christian martyrdom provides the ultimate act of redemption for his former unbelief, and he becomes a witness to the truth of Christ's sacrifice that as a Jew he had heard of but never understood in a spiritual sense. Narrative closure has thus been reached by giving Jacobus a new Christian identity that resolves, without altogether negating, his ambiguous and problematic Jewish identity.

This is not to say that the narrative achieves conversion and resolution without creating further ambiguities. The description of Judas' avowal of faith on the one hand confirms the power of the Cross and its accompanying miraculous signs to effect conversion, but, on the other, its placement in the narrative helps to quell potential questions as to the motives for Judas' co-operation with Helena. Since



Judas' resistance to the Christian enquiries is broken down only after threats of burning directed at his community and his own confinement and starvation of a week's duration, the narrative depicts elements of forced conversion as well as of conversion brought about by revelation. When Judas is portrayed as being 'filled with wonder,' this may help to dispel any uneasy feeling a reader might have that Judas' actions after being released from the well owe as much to the fear of further torture as to a genuine impulse to worship. Seen in this light, his subsequent declaration of faith resembles those that we looked at in connection with the 'Assumption' narratives discussed in Chapter Three, in which the Jewish priest is subjected to a punitive miracle, and can only be released from torment after professing certain specific points of Christian doctrine. In the 'Finding', however, both force and revelation play a part in transforming Judas from a potential source of resistance to Christianity into a champion of the faith. It is tempting to speculate that, as with the portions of the 'Finding' that relate the connection between Constantine's vision of the Cross and his military success, the account of Judas being threatened, thrown into the well and starved presents the use of force as being an acceptable way to achieve spiritual as well as political victory. However, the 'Finding' narrative at all points is careful to show that the use of force is 'endorsed', as it were, by an occurrence of miracle and revelation, and that the ultimate result is the triumph of Christ and of the Church.

It is, of course, also important to consider what kinds of non-literal significance Judas' sojourn in the well might contain. In order to understand these, we must refer back to a common topos of these tales, discussed in Chapter Three. This is the theme of the 'burial' and resurrection of a person or object, involving casting the person or object into a privy, pit, well, cauldron, oven or other enclosed place, from which he or it emerges transfigured. We discussed the connection of this theme with a Crucifixion-Resurrection pattern, with the enclosed space representing Christ's tomb, but also able to suggest hell, the harrowing of hell, and/or purgatory. In the 'Finding', it is not only the Jew Judas who undergoes the process of burial and resurrection, but also the Cross, and, before its construction, the wood from which it was made.

These events are described in connection with the early history of the Cross. Jacobus relates that the wood of the Tree of Mercy is incorporated into King Solomon's house, (*'Salomon autem arborem tam pulchram considerans ipsam praecipit incidi et in domo saltus locari'*).<sup>62</sup> until the King is prophetically advised by the Queen of Sheba that 'a certain man', i.e. Christ, will one day hang upon it and so destroy the kingdom of the Jews (*'regina Saba [...] intimavit Salomoni, quod in illo ligno quidam suspendendus esset, per cujus mortem Judaeorum regnum deleri deberet'*).<sup>63</sup> Thereupon Solomon has the wood 'buried in the deepest bowels of the earth' (*'Salomon igitur praedictum lignum inde sustulit et in profundissimis terrae visceribus illud demergi fecit'*). A pond forms on the spot and sacrificial animals are bathed there (*'Postea probatica piscina ibidem facta est, ubi Natmei'*<sup>64</sup> *hostias abluebant'*).<sup>65</sup> The pond where the sacrifices are cleansed is identified by Jacobus with the pond in John 5. 2-4 which is visited by an angel who disturbs the water, after which the pond acquires curative powers. Jacobus notes that the healing properties of the water were due also to the presence of the buried wood. Later, the wood floats to the surface of the water and 'the Jews' make the Cross out of it (*'Cum autem illud Judaei vidissent, ipsum acceperunt et crucem domino paraverunt'*).<sup>66</sup> Following the Crucifixion, 'this precious wood of the Cross was hidden underground for over two hundred years' before its discovery by Helena (*'Istud lignum crucis pretiosum per annos CC et ultra sub terra latuit, sed ab Helena, matre Constantini imperatoris, hoc modo repertum fuit'*).

<sup>62</sup> This and the following quotations relating to the early history of the Cross from *GL I*, pp. 277-8; *LA*, pp. 304-5. Ryan, *GL I*, p. 277, notes that the 'forest house', so-called because so many cedars had been used to build it, is mentioned in II Kings 7. This element of the legend seems to assimilate a passage from III Kings 10. 11-12, in which, during the queen of Sheba's visit, King Solomon is brought some 'thyine' trees by 'the navy of Hiram', and makes the trees into pillars, both for 'the house of the Lord' (i.e. the Temple) and 'the king's house'.

<sup>63</sup> These details, and perhaps others, Jacobus says he takes from the *Scholastic History* of Peter Comestor (Petrus Comestor, *Historia Scholastica*, PL 198, cols 1045 sq.), a work so widely cited and admired in the Middle Ages that in *Paradiso* Dante places Comestor ('Pietro Mangiadore'; the nickname refers to his hunger for learning) in the second Circle of the Sun; cf. *The Divine Comedy*, III: *Paradiso*, 12, l. 134, p. 180.

<sup>64</sup> Ryan speculates that this is an error for 'Nathinaei', temple servitors in 1 Chron. 9. 2, *GL I*, p. 278.

<sup>65</sup> In another version Jacobus briefly cites, the wood is not buried but used to build a bridge over a pond. *GL I*, p. 278; *LA*, p. 304.

<sup>66</sup> However, following this he says that the cross was made from four kinds of wood: 'palmwood, cedar, cypress and olivewood', citing the verse '*Ligna crucis palma, cedrus, cypressus, oliva*'; *ibid*. The inconsistency probably reflects Jacobus' desire to make use of material from varied sources, even when contradictory.

This story, with its repeated pattern of burial and emergence, marks out important moments of Judeo-Christian history. The burial of the wood comes at the historical moment of the founding of the first Jewish Temple; its emergence is connected to the Crucifixion; and when the Cross is unburied, this marks the founding of Christian Rome. Thus the burial of the Cross may in broad thematic terms have some connection with unbelief, moments in history when the faith did not prevail or its truest meaning was hidden, here represented by the time after the founding of the Jewish Temple<sup>67</sup> up until the Crucifixion, and after that, the time of the persecutions of early Christians by the emperors of pagan Rome. The first emergence of the wood of the Tree represents a brief hiatus, allowing the Crucifixion, which is both the darkest event of a dark time and a source of light to the Christians, to occur. The second emergence of the Cross stands for a time of revelation, in which the spiritual sense is understood, leading to an acceptance of the faith in the pagan world. Although Eusebius does not mention the finding of the Cross, we may compare his account of the uncovering of Christ's tomb at the site where Constantine was to erect his basilica:

[A]s soon as the original surface of the ground, beneath the covering of earth, appeared, immediately, and contrary to all expectation, the venerable and hallowed monument of our Saviour's resurrection was discovered. Then indeed did this most holy cave present a faithful similitude of his return to life, in that, after lying buried in darkness, it again emerged to light, and afforded to all who came to witness the sight, a clear and visible proof of the wonders of which that spot had once been the scene, a testimony to the resurrection of the Saviour clearer than any voice could give.<sup>68</sup>

In Eusebius' account we find a number of Jacobus' themes: an appearance that acts as proof of holy truths, the importance of witness, and, although this is not strictly speaking a miraculous appearance, the way in which a revelation can 'speak' more clearly than a 'voice', or rhetoric. It is also a tale of burial, emergence, and

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<sup>67</sup> Of course, the Jewish Temple may be used as a symbol of fealty to the Lord in early and medieval Christian texts. Here, however, Solomon, in the process of constructing the Temple, clearly fears the Christian prophecies associated with the wood of the Tree, and removes it from his 'house' – which may refer either to the Temple or to his own dwelling, or to both, as discussed above – and seeks to hide it on this account. It may be taken, then, that here the rise of the Temple represents a Jewish dominance, hostile to Christianity, which must in its turn be superseded by the coming of Christ.

<sup>68</sup> 'Life of Constantine', 3.28, pp. 527-8.

transformation from darkness into light. Similarly, in the 'Finding', the buried substance undergoes a transformation at each emergence. The first of these is its transformation from the wood of the 'Tree of Mercy' into the Cross, thus of course signifying Christ's redemption of Adam's sin. The second emergence, which follows Constantine's sighting of the sign of the Cross in the sky, marks the Cross's transformation into the accepted symbol of an established Christian Church.

Within this pattern, it is important to note that the second emergence of the Cross also entails the mutation of substance into sign, the symbol of Christianity. It is significant that the tale mentions the Cross appearing *as a sign* (to Constantine during battle) for the first time just before this final emergence. Edwyn Bevan says that, although in the second century 'mystical significance was attached by Christians to the shape of the Cross', it was not 'visibly represented in [...] early Christian art'. According to Bevan, '[i]t seems to have been Constantine himself who caused the Cross to come into general use as a Christian symbol'. After Constantine's famous vision of the Cross in the heavens, 'the Cross was accordingly embodied in the design of the new imperial banner, the labarum.'<sup>69</sup> Jan Willem Drijvers, however, attributes the new use of the symbol, not to Constantine's vision, but to the finding of the True Cross itself:

From the fourth century on, the sign of the Cross appeared nearly everywhere [...] Reverence for the Cross as a symbol was undoubtedly greatly stimulated by the 'discovery' of what was considered to be the True Cross.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps most intriguingly in the context of our discussion, de Lange charts the movement of the cross as sign from being a Jewish signifier to being a Christian signifier in the century before Constantine: 'The sign of the cross [...], which began as a Jewish symbol, is found in the Jewish catacombs at Rome, in the synagogue at Dura and on Jewish sarcophagi from Jerusalem dated from the last century B. C. to the early third A. D.; after the third century it ceased, understandably, to be used by Jews'.<sup>71</sup> In the 'Finding' narrative, the Cross as sign is connected with Helena's discovery and by implication the conversion of Rome. It is connected too with the

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<sup>69</sup> *Holy Images*, p. 98.

<sup>70</sup> *Helena Augusta*, p. 81.

<sup>71</sup> *Origen and the Jews*, p. 116.

conversion of the Jew Judas, and (following de Lange) the conversion of the Cross from being a Jewish to being a Christian symbol is mirrored in Judas' conversion, and by implication the conversion of the Jews to come, and the triumph of Christendom over Judaism. The sign of the Cross, then, is a signifier that works on many levels, and the legend of the finding of the True Cross reinforces and authenticates the Cross as the symbol of an established Christendom.

In connection with this point, it should be noted that the theme of the Cross as sign is used by Jacobus in another chapter of the *Legenda*. This is a short narrative, not previously discussed here, which forms part of the 'Exaltation' chapter. In this tale, a Jew comes to Rome and spends a night in a temple dedicated to Apollo. The Jew 'feared the sacrilegious nature of the place and, though he had no faith in the cross, took care to protect himself with the sign of the cross' ('*ipsum loci ipsius sacrilegium pertimescens, quamvis fidem crucis minime haberet, signo crucis tamen se munire curavit*').<sup>72</sup> It is unclear exactly whether an actual cross, an emblem or a simple tracing of the sign is meant.<sup>73</sup> After the Jew has thus protected himself, a group of evil spirits arrives, and they discuss their bad deeds, chief among which is their temptation of a bishop to unchastity. When they go to investigate the stranger in the temple, they see that he is 'signed with the mystery of the cross' ('*cum crucis mysterio signatum*') and 'cr[y] out in terror: "He is an empty vessel, indeed, but it is sealed!"' ('*territi clamaverunt: vere vas vacuum, sed signatum*'). They vanish and the Jew is later baptised by the repentant bishop.

In this narrative, the cross is potent against the enemies of Christ. The 'malign spirits' of the tale, who congregate in the temple of Apollo, may be conflated with pagan gods, as Augustine does in *De Civitate Dei*:

It was therefore only through this one and true religion that the gods of the nations could be revealed as most unclean demons: demons who, in the guise of spirits of the dead, or under the appearance of creatures of this world, desire to be thought gods. (*Per hanc ergo religionem unam et veram potuit aperiri, deos Gentium esse immundissimos daemones, sub defunctarum*

<sup>72</sup> This and the following quotations from 'The Exaltation of the Holy Cross', *GL* I, pp. 172-3; *LA*, pp. 609-11.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Chapter Three for a discussion of the conflation of the True Cross, the sign of the Cross, images of the Cross and the mystical Cross.



*occasionibus animarum vel creaturarum specie mundanarum deos se putari cupientes [...]*<sup>74</sup>

Thus, vanquishing the ‘demons’ may here evoke a triumph of Christianity over the pagans. Even if the evil spirits are not intended to represent pagan deities, Apollo’s temple provides no protection against them. In a narrative context where such protection proves the truth of a faith, this might be read as undermining any claims of Graeco-Roman worship to constitute a true religion. Similarly, in the ‘Finding’, a pagan temple has to be destroyed in order for the True Cross to be dug up.

As in the ‘Finding’, the role of the Jew in this tale from the ‘Exaltation’ chapter is anomalous. Judaic practice is not his chosen defence against evil; he does not turn to his own religion for aid. Instead, he utilises a Christian sign to protect him against the ‘sacrilegious’ pagan temple. However, he does not treat the Christian sign as being equally sacrilegious; furthermore, he seems satisfied of its utility *against* ‘sacrilegious’ places or beings, even though the narrative characterises him as having ‘no faith in the cross’. This seems to hint at his belonging, like Judas in the ‘Finding’, to an unstable category of ‘Jewishness’, being unconverted and without faith, yet having access to Christian knowledge. Unlike Judas, however, this Jew makes use of his Christian knowledge without coercion, ‘sealing’ himself against evil, and ‘signing’ himself with the ‘mystery of the Cross’ in so doing.

It is worthwhile here, in the context of the Cross as sign, to look at the concept of the Jew being ‘sealed’ and ‘signed’. In Revelation (The Apocalypse of St John in the Douay-Rheims Bible), the term ‘signed’ (*signati* in the Vulgate and ‘sealed’ in the King James Bible) is applied to certain amongst the tribes of Israel:

And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the sign of the living God; and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying: Hurt not the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, till we sign the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them that were signed, an hundred forty-four thousand were signed, of every tribe of the children of Israel. (Apocalypse 7. 2-4)

The verses go on to number the Israelites of each tribe who are signed. Margaret Barker says that these Israelites were those baptised in preparation for ‘the last time’:

<sup>74</sup> *City of God*, 7.33, p. 307; *De civitate Dei*, 7.33, PL 41, col. 221.



The Damascus Document tells of the remnant which held fast to the commandments of God, to whom were revealed 'the hidden things in which all Israel had gone astray' This is very similar to the description of the children of the woman in [Revelation] 12. 17; they 'kept the commandments of God and had the testimony of Jesus,' i.e. guarded what Jesus had seen.<sup>75</sup>

Barker, arguing for a continuity between pre-Christian Jewish mysticism and the tradition of Christian initiates, also compares these Jewish Christians, bearers of 'hidden things', with the Levite priests of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, who guarded the Holy of Holies in the Temple.<sup>76</sup>

The latter connection is unlikely to have been evoked by Jacobus. However, the Jew in the 'Exaltation' tale who is sealed with the sign of the cross could in that respect be associated with those Israelites who had experienced revelation and whom the prophecy declared would be saved. Revelation is a cryptic text, but seems here in conflict with Paul, whose eschatological vision of salvation embraced all Israel:

And so all Israel should be saved, as it is written: There shall come out of Sion, he that shall deliver, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is to them my covenant: when I shall take away their sins. (Rom. 11. 26-7).

In the 'Exaltation' tale, the Jew before his conversion seems to belong to both the saved and the unsaved categories: although 'sealed' with the sign of the cross, he is 'empty', presumably of the Holy Spirit, which he has yet to embrace. As mentioned above, he is similar in this to Judas in the 'Finding' before his own conversion, who has a measure of Christian knowledge, but has not experienced grace.

Ryan translates *signatum* in the 'Exaltation' tale as both 'signed' and 'sealed'. In Latin, 'seal' (*sigilla*) and 'sign' (*signum*) are partial synonyms, and have multiple meanings that evoke many of Jacobus' themes in these texts. For *sigilla*, Lewis and Short give the meanings of 'little figures or images', including 'figures on seal-rings'; a seal; and, 'in the sing. for *signum*, sign'.<sup>77</sup> The nature of the 'figures or

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<sup>75</sup> *Revelation*, p. 158.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, and cf. p. 28.

<sup>77</sup> Charlton D. Lewis (with Charles Short), *A Latin Dictionary* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1879, 2002) p. 1696.

images' is found under *sigillaria*; one meaning is 'images of the gods'.<sup>78</sup> For *signum* they give not only 'a mark, token, sign', but also a military use, 'a military standard'. Other meanings include 'a sign or token of any thing to come, a prognostic'; 'an image, as a work of art'; 'a seal, signet'; 'a sign in the heavens, a constellation'; and, finally, from ecclesiastical Latin, 'miraculous works'.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, the polysemous term associatively links heavenly signs with military banners, as we find in the tale of Constantine, '*in hoc signo vinces*', and connects religious icons, prophecy and miracles with the idea of the sign. The verb *signo* also illuminates; meaning 'to set a mark upon, to mark, mark out', as well as 'to mark with a seal; to seal, seal up'. From this is also derived *signatus*, (whence '*signatum*') meaning 'shut up, guarded, preserved,' which can have connotations of 'unharmful, intact, pure'.<sup>80</sup> To be 'sealed' with the sign of the Cross, like the Jew in the 'Exaltation' tale, is thus to be preserved and guarded, like the knowledge of the initiates, and also to be marked out like the Israelites in Revelation, with the seal of the Lord upon their foreheads. Another meaning of *signatus* is 'plain, clear, manifest', and here again the Jew's being 'signed' with the mystery of the cross makes his divine protection manifest to the malign spirits. 'Seal' also carries the connotation of the sealing of letters and documents; the Jew is 'sealed', like a document, inscribed with the sign of the Cross, both 'sealed up' and protected, and 'signed' with the mark of the Christian God.

Hence, the concept of the sign in Roman culture contained links with the idea of the sacred, of objects marked and set apart, of prognostication, and of the concept of things shut away, guarded and preserved. Here we see meanings which were adopted in early Christian literature, and connected with the pattern of burial and resurrection. As mentioned above, in the 'Finding of the Holy Cross', the emergence of the buried Cross is also a 'sign or token' of things to come, that is, the establishment of the Roman Church, making possible the open and widespread use of the Cross as the sign of Christianity. The theme of burial, resurrection and transformation itself can be used to sign the changing nature, context or spiritual state of what is buried. We have seen that in the 'Finding' narrative, the Cross takes

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 1697-8.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 1697.

on new meanings with each emergence, meanings connected with Judeo-Christian history, culminating in the Christianisation of Rome. It remains to be seen whether the episode of Judas being confined in the dry well employs similar patterning.

Judas is 'buried' in the well for seven days, and his release is also an emergence into the Christian faith. This episode evokes many possible layers of meaning. The most obvious parallel is the pattern, typologically equivalent to Joseph in the pit and Jonah in the whale, that mirrors the crucifixion, entombment and resurrection of Christ. An interesting parallel comes from the fragmentary texts known as the 'Gospel of Gamaliel', relating the story of how soldiers insist that Christ's body has been stolen, and Pilate is led by 'Jews' to a well in a garden where there is the body of a crucified man. Joseph (presumably Joseph of Arimathea), Nicodemus and Gamaliel are also present. The hostile Jews insist this is the body of the 'sorcerer', that is, Jesus, but Joseph and Nicodemus identify it as the thief crucified with Jesus, whereupon the hostile Jews want to throw the two of them into the well.<sup>81</sup> This legend is significant when read alongside, not only the 'Finding', but also the 'Beirut' tale,<sup>82</sup> with its own mention of Nicodemus and Gamaliel and connection to apocryphal literature, and the *Toldoth Jeshu*, a satirical Jewish text based on Christian gospels and apocrypha, discussed in Chapter Five. The crucifixion, burial and resurrection not only appear in a variety of apocryphal narratives, they form a *topos* basic to early and medieval Christian literature and appear again and again in Jacobus' tales about Jews.

If Judas' entombment in the well mirrors Christ's burial, the Christian legend of Christ's harrowing of hell during the three days before his reappearance may be significant.<sup>83</sup> In addition to Christ's tomb, the well of Judas in the *Legenda* may represent an entrance to the underworld. In Chapter Three, in connection with the story of the Jewish boy, we discussed the identification of the oven into which the Jewish boy is thrown with the hellmouth. Although the fiery oven is a more obvious hellmouth than the dry well, this association is amongst those evoked by the burial-resurrection pattern; in addition, underworld or 'otherworld' entrances can be

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<sup>81</sup> *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 160.

<sup>82</sup> *GL* II, p. 171; *LA*, pp. 608-9.

<sup>83</sup> For a thorough account of the 'descent' myth in classical and other sources and the related 'harrowing of hell' *topos* of early Christianity, cf. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell*.

associated with wells, rivers or the sea.<sup>84</sup> MacCulloch quotes a statement from the Fourth Council of Toledo to the effect that 'the immersion in water is as a descent *in infernum*, and the coming forth again from the water is a resurrection'.<sup>85</sup> Judas' well, of course, is a dry one; nonetheless, his sojourn in the well may recall the threat of hell for unconverted Jews.

The period spent by Judas in the well in the 'Finding' and its correspondence to the harrowing of hell can also be understood with reference to Adam. An early tradition had it that Adam had been buried in the same place where Christ was crucified. A quotation attributed to Origen reads: 'Adam was buried in Calvary, the place of the head, so that the head of the human race might find resurrection with all people by the Resurrection of Christ who suffered there.'<sup>86</sup> According to tradition, not only did the Crucifixion redeem the sin of Adam, but, as a result of Christ's descent into hell, the Jewish forebears Adam and Eve were saved and brought into Paradise. In the 'Finding', the Cross, which as we remember was made with the wood of a tree that had sprung from Adam's grave, is buried after the Crucifixion, presumably close to the same place, that is, Calvary, and then found underground and brought forth. The Cross is thus linked not only with Christ, but also with Adam in the legend, and Judas' descent into the well and recovery of the Cross has a rough thematic parallel to Christ's descent into hell and redemption of Adam.

Judas thus takes on some of the characteristics of a redeemer, even though his name is the same as that of the traitor Judas Iscariot. Drijvers remarks that 'in [early] Christian opinion all Jews can be identified with Iskarioth'<sup>87</sup>; we saw above Langland's comment about the medieval Christian view of Jews, who 'we jugge Judas felawes'<sup>88</sup>. Yet in the 'Finding,' the Jew Judas is explicitly contrasted by the Devil with 'my Judas'. Drijvers comments that

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Howard Rollin Patch, *The Other World: According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950): '[...] the approach to the region is sometimes underground, down a well perhaps, and sometimes under the sea' (p. 3). Patch cites a classical topos (from Socrates) of Hades as a chasm into which the rivers of the earth poured (p. 20), and cites medieval visions of rivers or lakes, usually fiery, in or representing hell (p. 129, and cf. pp. 87-133). An example of an 'Otherworld' association with a well in the Celtic tradition is the undersea 'Well of Wisdom' or Connla's well, cited in Mary A. C. Low, *Celtic Christianity and Nature: Early Irish and Hebridean Traditions* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1996), pp. 68-9.

<sup>85</sup> The Fourth Council of Toledo, canon VI (633 A. D.), cited in MacCulloch, p. 248.

<sup>86</sup> Origen, 'tract. 35 in Matt.' (source not found), cited in MacCulloch, p. 339.

<sup>87</sup> Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, p. 180.

<sup>88</sup> *Piers Plowman* 9, l. 85, p. 134.

the betrayal of Christ by Judas Iskarioth, i.e. by Jewry, his subsequent death on the Cross and Jewish rejection of Christianity, is compensated for by the legendary Judas who betrayed his own people by surrendering the victorious Cross to the Christians, who recognized the Messiah and who eventually became Cyriacus (=of the Lord).<sup>89</sup>

The 'Finding' Judas thus stands in relation to Iscariot as Christ does to Adam or Mary to Eve, as the redeemer of an act of sin. However, there may also be a suggestion in the tale that, just as Judas Iscariot, by his betrayal, unwittingly makes Christ's redemption of mankind possible, the Judas of the 'Finding', without it being his conscious intent, becomes the mechanism whereby Christianity is helped to emerge and gain victory over a Jewish and pagan world. Thus, the new Judas is both like the original Judas and opposed to him; in 'betraying' the Cross' location and the secret Jewish knowledge, his treachery towards Judaism is converted into faith towards Christianity when he himself undergoes conversion.

The assimilation of Judas into the Christian faith thus has not only personal but also eschatological and allegorical significance. One point to be made about the allegorical connection between Judas in the well and Christ in the tomb, however, concerns the number of days involved. The Judas of the tale is in the well for seven days, not three as we might expect if the connection is to the time between Christ's death and his reappearance. For the significance of the period of seven days, we can turn to Augustine, who saw time as a construction based on cyclic repetitions of the number seven:

he who says 'seven times', signifies all time, whence in this world there are continual revolutions of seven days ('*Totum enim tempus significat qui dicit, septies. Unde septem dierum volumine saecula provolvuntur*').<sup>90</sup>

Given the linkage of the burials of the Cross with stages of Judeo-Christian history, it is possible to see a connection, not only with the seven days of creation, but also with

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<sup>89</sup> *Helena Augusta*, p. 180.

<sup>90</sup> Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, 2 vols (Oxford: Parker, 1844-5), I (1844), 45.2, pp. 365-6; *Sermones de Scripturis*, PL 38-9 (Paris: Migne, 1863), cols 23-994 (95.2, col. 581). Note that the sermon bears a different number in the English and Latin editions.

Augustine's analogous 'seven days' or seven ages of man, running from Creation to the 'present' age, and beyond to the end times.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, Judas' burial encompasses the whole of Judeo-Christian history, from man's creation from the earth up to the end of Time. Judas' symbolic connection is to all of this history, but particularly relates to the emergence of Christianity as, according to Pauline doctrine, the culmination and replacement of Judaism. His time in the pit is thus representative of Jewish spiritual 'darkness,' and of the old Law and the old era. For Augustine, the symbolism of seven was connected with deicide as well, since he saw the Jews as being subject to a 'sevenfold penalty' for the Crucifixion.<sup>92</sup> He also said that the existence of the Jews, who killed the Lord, would be a proof of subjugation to Christians to the end of the 'seven days of time'.<sup>93</sup> At the end of the seven days, Judas' release signals the new dispensation and fulfilment of the Law, and the birth of the Christian Church, emerging out of Judaism and superseding it. Corresponding to this, in eschatological terms, the end of the seven days represents the end of the present era, the Day of Judgement and the establishment of the New Jerusalem, superseding in its turn all that has gone before. Judas fits into this pattern if we think of him as representing the Jewish people from the perspective of Christian eschatology. Jan Willem Drijvers notes that the name 'Judas' closely resembles 'Judaesus' and that he may thus represent 'all Jewry'.<sup>94</sup> He comments that, 'the story of Judas' conversion gives expression to the Christian hope that all Jews one day, like Judas [...] will become converted to the Christian faith'.<sup>95</sup> The conversion of Judas fits into the tale's evocation of the entirety of Christian history, foreshadowing the eventual conversion (according to Pauline doctrine) of all Israel at the end of time.

The starvation and burial, 'death,' experienced by Judas is also the death of his Jewish identity, and his emergence is his rebirth as a Christian. Jacobus uses this

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<sup>91</sup> Augustine measures in generations rather than years: ten generations to the first two ages, fourteen to the next three. The first 'day' extends from Adam to the Flood; the second from the Flood to Abraham; the third from Abraham to David; the fourth from David to the Babylonian exile; the fifth from the exile to Christ. The sixth day, Augustine explains, is now in being. The seventh will be a Sabbath, of which the evening will constitute 'an eighth and eternal day' (*City of God* 22.30, p. 1182).

<sup>92</sup> 'Reply to Faustus', 7.12, p. 187.

<sup>93</sup> 'Reply to Faustus', 12.12, pp. 187-8.

<sup>94</sup> *Helena Augusta*, p. 180.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*



theme in another chapter of the *Legenda*, ‘St Basil, bishop’,<sup>96</sup> of which the final anecdote concerns Basil’s death. In his final illness, Basil consults a Jewish physician named Joseph, whom he is said to love, because of his foreknowledge that he is to convert Joseph to Christianity. Basil challenges Joseph’s prediction of his immediate death: ‘And if I survive till tomorrow at the sixth hour, what will you do?’ (*et si in crastinum usque ad horam sextam supervixero, quid facies?*) Joseph replies that, in this case, he himself will be the one to die, and Basil responds, ‘Yes, may you die to sin, but live to Christ!’ (*etiam moriaris peccato, vivas autem Christo!*). Basil remains alive past the stipulated time and Joseph accepts baptism at his hands.

The starvation of Judas in the ‘Finding’ may also indicate his hunger for truth and his inability to be nourished on the Old Law. The parallel between carnal and spiritual hunger is set forth by Augustine:

In expounding to you the Holy Scriptures, I as it were break bread for you. Do ye in hunger receive it, and break forth with a fullness of [praise] from the heart; and ye who are rich in your banquet, be not meagre in good works and deeds. What I deal out to you is not mine own. What ye eat, I eat; what ye live upon, I live upon. We have in heaven a common store-house; for from thence comes the Word of God. (*Scripturas sanctas exponentes vobis, quasi panes frangimus vobis. Vos esurientes accipite, et saginam laudis corde eructate: et qui estis divites in epulis, nolite macri esse in operibus et factis bonis. Quod ergo erogo vobis, non est meum. Quod manducatis, manduco: unde vivitis, vivo. Commune habemus in coelo celarium: inde enim verbum Dei.*)<sup>97</sup>

Like hunger, thirst is a metaphor for spiritual longing. The fact that Judas is buried in a dry well is of significance. In the Old Testament, water can be used to indicate spiritual as well as physical refreshment, as in Isaiah 41. 17-18:

The needy and the poor seek for waters, and there are none: their tongue hath been dry with thirst. I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in the high hills, and fountains in the midst of the plains: I will turn the desert into pools of waters, and the impassable land into streams of waters.

<sup>96</sup> *GL* I, pp. 112-3; *LA*, pp. 125-6.

<sup>97</sup> Augustine, *Sermons*, I, 45.1, pp. 365; *Sermones*, 95.1, col. 581.

In the episode in which a Samaritan woman (John 4. 6-30) brings an empty vessel to Jacob's well and receives teachings from Jesus in place of the well-water she came for, the 'water' she is given represents the gift of eternal life through Christ:

he that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst for ever:  
But the water that I will give him, shall become in him a fountain of water,  
springing up into life everlasting (John 4. 13-14).

The idea of healing water is found in many early and medieval contexts, notably in pagan well-worship and in medieval and later Christian dedications of healing wells to a saint. In the medieval Celtic tradition, stories associated with St Columba and St Patrick recount the conversion of wells from pagan to Christian purposes, showing a continuity between pre-Christian and Christian traditions regarding the supernatural and spiritual associations with well-water.<sup>98</sup> Thus, a medieval audience would easily read the 'dry well' of Judas' confinement as a place from which the Holy Spirit was absent.

Water is significant earlier in the 'Finding' chapter, when the pond that forms above the burial place of the wood of the Tree acquires curative powers. In the tale, the dryness of Judas' well can thus be contrasted with the water associated with the Cross, and the healing powers of the Cross itself. As these represent the healing of humanity by Christ, so the dry well represents Judas' condition of spiritual dryness. Additionally, of course, water is the medium of Christian baptism, and the absence of water in the well may signal Judas' unbaptised condition. The tale of the Jew in the temple of Apollo in the 'Exaltation' chapter, which was discussed above, also illustrates this theme. When the demons fly from him in fright, exclaiming, 'He is an empty vessel, indeed, but it is sealed', the Jew is compared to a dry vessel, which does not hold the 'water' corresponding to initiation and spiritual understanding, but which is nevertheless 'sealed' by the sign of the cross and is thus impenetrable.

Finally, the polysemous burial and emergence pattern, which in its essence is death and resurrection, also stands for knowledge hidden and knowledge revealed. In the 'Jewish boy' story from Jacobus' 'Assumption' chapter,<sup>99</sup> for example, the emergence of the boy from the fiery oven is due to his having desired to go to church

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Low, *Celtic Christianity and Nature*, pp. 59-63.

<sup>99</sup> *GL* II, pp. 87-8; *LA*, pp. 515-6.

and take Communion, thus prompting Mary to act as his protectress. The boy has hidden his knowledge of Christ; after it is revealed, although he is tested, he can be saved (reborn). The demise of his father in the same oven is due to the father's lack of any such knowledge: the boy's experience of Communion rouses only hostility in him, and the spiritual message is hidden from him. In the 'Finding,' the Jew Judas emerges from his 'burial' at the moment when he agrees to make the hidden knowledge known. From the beginning of the description of the history of the Cross, the secret knowledge of the Jews becomes the property of the Christians through a series of symbolic burials and rebirths. Each of these adds a layer of re-inscription: tree to Cross, Cross to sign and the emblem of an established Church; Judas as Jew to Judas as Christian.

Another tale from the *Legenda* involving knowledge hidden and revealed is the third of the short narratives about Jews in the chapter 'St Nicholas'.<sup>100</sup> A Christian in debt to a Jew swears on the altar of St Nicholas to repay the loan, but evades the payment by means of a trick: he fills a hollow staff with gold coins and asks the Jew to hold it. The Christian is thus able to swear before a judge that he has returned more than he owes. He then takes back the staff from the Jew, who remains ignorant of the trick. Subsequently the Christian is run over by a coach and killed. In the accident the staff breaks open to reveal the gold. The tale continues:

Being informed of this, the Jew hurried to the spot and saw through the trick; but, though the bystanders urged him to pick up his money, he refused unless the dead man were restored to life by the merits of Saint Nicholas, in which case he himself would become a Christian and accept baptism. (*Audiens hoc Judaeus concitus illico venit cumque dolum vidisset et a multis ei suggereretur, ut aurum reciperet, omnino renuit, nisi qui defunctus fuerat, ad vitam beati Nicolai meritis redderetur, asserens, se, si hoc fieret, baptismum suscepturum et Christianum futurum*).

Following the Jew's speech, the dead man is resurrected and the Jew becomes a Christian.

This tale recalls the passage from Langland discussed at the beginning of this chapter, in which the Jews are set up as a spiritual example to the Christians because, although they are the people who, in Langland's words 'we jugge Judas felawes',

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<sup>100</sup> *GL* I, p. 25; *LA*, p. 27.

they are generous with their wealth and look after their poor. Similarly, in the tale from the 'St Nicholas' chapter, the Jew behaves in a more 'Christian' manner than the Christian who cheats him. In cheating the Jew, the Christian displays not merely avarice but treachery as well, behaving more like the Biblical Judas than the Jew. By contrast, in refusing to collect the debt to which he has every right, the Jew appears as an antitype of Judas, and also is portrayed in a way that counters the medieval stereotype of the usurious Jew.

Even when in possession of the staff, the Jew remains ignorant of its hidden value, which is however known to the Christian. This recalls Augustine's conception of the Jews: the Jews carry about the books of Scripture all unaware of their hidden truth, so that while the Jews own the physical books, the Christians lay claim to their spiritual message. The contested ownership of the hidden gold (read hidden meaning) in the 'St Nicholas' tale reflects these issues. Regarding ownership, it is interesting that the treasure of the Christian is only borrowed, and originally belonged to the Jew. Here we may remember St Paul's Epistle to the Romans, in which he tells the gentiles that the Christian message was originally intended for the Jews, but is offered now to the gentiles, since the Jews, who Paul calls the original 'root' and 'branches' of the olive tree,<sup>101</sup> that is, the faith, cannot appreciate it. However, in this tale, the value of the staff is not only hidden (until the staff breaks) from the unbelieving Jew. The *true* value of the gold, as spiritual treasure and not material treasure only, is hidden from the Christian, who is thus seen here as sinning and in need of redemption.

The Christian's untimely death may be seen as a just reward for his treachery and lack of spiritual understanding, or as a *via negativa* which he must travel in order to be finally redeemed and resurrected. The event that causes his death also causes the staff to break open and reveal the treasure hidden within. Here 'gold' may represent a non-material value, preciousness, in the same sense in which Jacobus' *Legenda Sanctorum* became known to the late medieval and following ages as the *Legenda Aurea*.<sup>102</sup> Spiritual value can also be implied. Here some analogy may be

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<sup>101</sup> Rom. 11. 16-24.

<sup>102</sup> The reading offered here of the hidden gold in the staff representing hidden knowledge or value is borne out by a tale from Livy, which the authors of the Nicholas tale may have had in mind. Lucius Junius Brutus, whose brother has been killed by his uncle, Tarquin, feigns dull-wittedness (hence 'Brutus'), while secretly plotting to overthrow the Tarquins. '[Brutus] it was who was then taken by

made between the staff and the Cross, since the Crucifixion is also redemption of sin, and the Cross a wooden object that, when its spiritual sense is revealed, signifies life coming out of death. We see again the pattern, in a somewhat different form, of death and resurrection, and of something being hidden or buried and later revealed.

In this case, the revelation of the treasure in the staff is also a spiritual revelation to the Jew. After this event, he refuses to collect his debt according to the bargain that treated the gold as material wealth only. The new bargain he strikes takes the spiritual sense of the treasure into account, and he offers to 'die' as a Jew and be 'reborn' as a Christian if the resurrection of the Christian takes place. Thus both Christian and Jew undergo an analogous process, with the Christian undergoing literal death and resurrection, and the Jew metaphorical 'death' with regard to his Jewish identity and 'rebirth' into a Christian identity. The Jew's new bargain is the bargain of Christ, offering his 'death' in order to win redemption for the sin of another.

What is interesting with respect to the Jew's spiritual revelation is whether, even before witnessing the miracle, the Jew is portrayed as believing that Nicholas' merits can indeed restore the dead to life. As with the tale of the Jew in the pagan temple in 'Exaltation', the Jew in 'Nicholas' is depicted as having some knowledge of the protective, or, in this instance, curative, powers connected with Christianity. He demonstrates an awareness of the posthumous healing abilities of saints, even seeming to consider St Nicholas as potentially having Christ's power to restore the dead to life. Although forgiving the Christian his bargain, the Jew strikes another type of 'bargain,' promising to convert if the miracle of resurrection occurs. His willingness to enter into this bargain may be read either as a belief that Nicholas does have the power of Christ (and implicitly as a belief in Christ's resurrection) or as a desire to test the power of the Christian faith.

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the Tarquinius to Delphi, more as a butt than as a comrade, and he is said to have carried a golden staff inclosed [sic] within one of cornel wood, hollowed out to receive it, as a gift to Apollo, and as a roundabout indication of his own character'. (*Is tum ab Tarquiniis ductus Delphos, ludibrium verius quam comes, aureum baculum inclusum corneo cavato ad id baculo tulisse donum Apollini dicitur, per ambages effigiem ingenii sui.*) Livy, *Livy*, trans. by B. O. Foster, 13 vols (London: Heinemann, 1919-59), I (1919), 1.56 9-10, pp. 194-7.



As a testing figure, he would resemble the Jewish characters who attack icons in medieval tales, and particularly Jewish desecrators of the Host.<sup>103</sup> These host-desecrators occupy an ambiguous territory between belief and unbelief, both drawn to experiment with the Host to see whether it is in fact the body of Christ, and scornful of Christian claims in this regard. Yet the portrayal of the Jew in ‘St Nicholas’, who stands to lose all his money if Nicholas is unable to revive the Christian, is perhaps weighted in favour of the Jew’s belief that the miracle will happen. The spiritual revelation, symbolised by the reappearance of the gold, that inspires the Jew to re-evaluate his bargain on a non-material level, should logically also lead the Jew to expect the miracle of resurrection. A parallel we can draw here is with the ‘Jewish boy’ tale from Jacobus’ ‘Assumption’ chapter, in which the little Jewish boy is drawn to the Christian religion, taking communion in a Christian church. In promising to convert if the miracle occurs, the ‘Nicholas’ Jew may be categorised with a subset of ‘hermeneutical’ Jews in Christian narrative who desire to become Christians.

There is another tale in the ‘St Nicholas’ chapter that in some ways resembles the tales about hostile Jews discussed in Chapter Three, but in others demonstrates a Jewish ‘belief’ in the power of Christian icons. The tale offers a humorous take on the theme of Jews attacking icons.<sup>104</sup> A Jew who has witnessed the miracles of St Nicholas installs a statue of the saint in his house, ordering it on pain of a beating to guard his goods from thieves. When he is in fact robbed, he upbraids the statue and beats it for failing in its duties. St Nicholas then appears to the thieves and shows them his bruises, ordering them to bring back the stolen goods, or the anger of God will fall on them. Once the thieves realise that he is Nicholas, they return the stolen items and reform, while the Jew converts. Here again, many of the patterns appear that we discussed with regard to the previous tale. The Jew is convinced from the start that a Christian icon is endowed with miraculous virtue. Erring Christian characters appear, and in this case are able to benefit from the miracle, returning to righteousness. The implicit comparison between earthly and heavenly treasure is made; the Jew invokes the power of the saint to protect his earthly goods, but the true power of the saint is in conferring heavenly rewards. The Jew in this tale is hostile in

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, and the Croxton ‘Play of the Sacrament’.

<sup>104</sup> *GL* I, pp. 25-6; *LA*, pp. 27-8.



that he attacks an icon, yet his intent is not to defile a Christian symbol, but to spur the saint into action, implying a belief in Nicholas' protective powers.

In this chapter we have seen a pattern of Jews triggering miracles that differs somewhat from that discussed in Chapter Three. In these tales, miracles are caused on the whole not by Jewish attack, but rather by Jewish actions that resemble Christian worship: the prayers of Judas, the recourse to the Cross in the pagan temple and the Jew's Christ-like 'bargain' with St Nicholas in the tale of the hollow staff. Yet the Jews involved are not entirely benign with regard to Christianity, but occupy an unstable territory, being at once resistant and supportive, ignorant and knowledgeable, outcasts and initiates. At the end of the tales, the conversion of the Jews resolves and clarifies their uncertain status. The miracle brings about a harmonious resolution, often following a symbolic death and resurrection, eschatologically corresponding to the Christian myth of the Day of Judgement, when the Jews convert and the evils of sin and death are negated. The tales stress above all the utility of the Jew, making the idea of miraculous Jewish conversion part of an early and medieval Christian myth of transformation and becoming.

Outside the parameters of myth and miracle legends, however, it was becoming more difficult for medieval Christianity to rely upon the utility of the Jew as a justification for toleration. In the century in which Jacobus compiled the *Legenda Aurea*, Christians became increasingly aware that, through Talmudic scholarship, Judaism had a recognisably autonomous centre, independent of what Christians saw as their role as precursors of Christianity.<sup>105</sup> Prompted by new Christian awareness of the Talmud, formally staged disputations were held at Paris and at Barcelona, in which Christian converts from Judaism discoursed with rabbis in an attempt to prove from the Talmud that Christ was the messiah.<sup>106</sup> These rhetorical duels followed a Christian tradition of written 'dialogues' between supposed exemplars of different faiths, intended to prove the truth of Christianity. An early legend concerning the life of St Silvester, of which Jacobus includes a version in the *Legenda Aurea*, recounts a fourth-century 'disputation' that includes magic and miracle as well as argument. This tale, the subject of the following chapter, provides

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, pp. 60-76.

<sup>106</sup> These disputations are discussed in Chapter Five.

roles for Jews that we have not yet explored: as rhetoricians, as magicians, as rivals and as competitors.

## Chapter Five: Disputation, Miracle and Magic

The literary genre comprising accounts of disputations between Christians and Jews, whether fictitious or based on real conversations, offered early and medieval Christian writers a chance to address, and then to subdue, potentially dangerous disbelief regarding aspects of doctrine. In these works, dissent and doubt with regard to Christian doctrine are associated with Jews and Jewish qualities. Jewish disbelief is shown to stem from a literal or ‘carnal’ approach to religiosity. While Jewish rhetoric is shown to be defective because of the Jews’ lack of spiritual understanding, Christian rhetoric is seen to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Yet, in some texts of this kind, even when Christian argument is portrayed as being superior, there is no clear victory for the Christian side of the debate. This applies to the second-century ‘Dialogue with Trypho’, for example, and to the eighth-century *Disputation of Sergius the Stylite Against a Jew*. Both end with the Jew or Jews remaining unconvinced by the power of Christian rhetoric. Perhaps in response to the perceived inadequacies of disputation accounts in which language is relied on to counter Jewish unbelief, a genre was created in the early centuries of Christianity that combined the literary disputation with the miracle tale. In texts belonging to this genre, a miraculous event intervenes in a disputation and proves the truth of the Christian argument. In these tales, miracle is treated as the highest form of rhetoric. While words can be re-interpreted owing to the polysemous and unstable nature of language, miracle, as a manifestation of the divine Logos and the divine presence, is shown to be irrefutable.

The long ‘discussion’ episode in Jacobus’ chapter on St Silvester, describing a disputation between Silvester and twelve Jewish scholars, is an example of this genre, and will be compared here to other early Christian examples. In ‘Silvester’, the miracle involves the invocation of names of power or holy names, and will thus also be compared to Jewish texts that contrast with the Christian examples by problematising the concept of the use of the Holy Name. A distinction is made in the ‘Silvester’ tale and some of its analogues, like the apocryphal duel between St Peter

and Simon Magus in the apocryphal 'Acts of Peter',<sup>1</sup> between the deployment of holy power (categorised as miracle) and unholy power (categorised as magic). Rhetoric and argument in the tales can, in a parallel distinction, seen to be allied with spiritual or with literal interpretations of texts. Jewish rhetoric is seen as being bound to the letter rather than being imbued with spirit, and Jewish wonder-working is portrayed as reflecting, not divine, but demonic influence.

The principal legend to be discussed in this chapter is a long episode from the *Legenda* chapter entitled 'Saint Silvester'. Silvester or Sylvester (Pope Sylvester I, 314-335) was bishop of Rome during the reign of Constantine, and in legend is thought to have baptised the first Christian emperor. His legend predates the *Legenda* by some eight centuries, the Latin version of his life having been tentatively dated as late fifth century.<sup>2</sup> Like the 'Finding of the Holy Cross' discussed above in Chapter Four, the 'Silvester' chapter consists of a number of segments or episodes built around events, legendary and factual, of the fourth century: as Duchesne has it, '*la conversion de l'empire romain, le triomphe de la religion chrétienne sur le judaïsme et le paganisme, symbolisé par la légende de Constantin et de Silvestre*'. ('The conversion of the Roman empire, the triumph of the Christian religion over Judaism and paganism, symbolised by the legend of Constantine and Silvester.')

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The episode we are concerned with is an account of a disputation between Silvester and twelve Jewish scholars, supposed to have been organised by

<sup>1</sup> For a translation of 'The Acts of Peter' and 'Secondary Acts of Peter', cf. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 390-430.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Le Liber Pontificalis*, ed. by Louis Duchesne, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises, 1886-1892), I, pp. cix-cxii. Duchesne describes the Syriac, Greek and Latin versions of the *Life of Silvester* (or *Actus Silvestri*) that are known to him. He notes Syriac MSS as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, but thinks these are translations from Greek. He believes both the Greek and Syriac versions are derived from the Latin version, of which the only edition is Mombricitus, *Sanctuarium, sive Vitae Sanctorum collectae ex codicibus mss.*, Milan, n.d. (c. 1475), v.II, fo. 279 (Duchesne, p. cix). The Latin version he believes dates from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the traditional ascription to Eusebius, (found in the preface of the Latin *Life*, and affirmed by Jacobus and many others), Duchesne says that, while the *Actus* is cited in the index of pseudo-Gelasius (*Decretum Gelasianum, On Ecclesiastical Books*, once ascribed to Pope Gelasius I, d. 49, thought now to belong to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century), the work is not there ascribed to Eusebius, but only says, '*eius qui conscripsit nomen ignoratur*' (p. cxiv); Duchesne further states that '*Eusèbe n'a point écrit la vie de saint Silvestre*' (p. cxii). Cf. F. C. Burkitt, 'The Decretum Gelasianum', *Journal of Theological Studies* 14 (1913), 469-471. Cf. also Jan Willem Drijvers, who also dates the *Actus Silvestri* to the last half of the fifth century. (*Helena Augusta*, p. 37.) Hayman, however, dates the 'discussion' segment of the Silvester legend to the early sixth century: cf. *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite*, pp. 15\*-16\*. Drijvers believes Greek to have been the original language of the Acts (p. 16\*). He also explores the relationship between the 'discussion' and the *Disputation of Sergius* (pp. 15\*-22\*).

<sup>3</sup> Duchesne, p. cix.

Constantine's mother Helena, and to have resulted in her conversion: interestingly, she is depicted in the legend as reproaching Constantine for forsaking Judaism, rather than a pagan religion.<sup>4</sup> The 'Silvester' episode stands out from the other narratives in the *Legenda* in that it is structured around a theological debate. However, the 'Silvester' episode also contains a miracle which occurs at the climax of the disputation, both reinforcing the rhetorical victory of the Christian side and at the same time offering an alternative means of persuasion to the verbal dispute. The Christian miracle is preceded by a Jewish 'miracle' or magical act: a bull is slain by a learned Jew through the invocation of a name of power, and subsequently brought back to life by Silvester speaking the name of Christ.

This episode evokes literary contexts that we have not yet seen in the *Legenda*. The first is the polemics of the early church, directed against the beliefs of pagans, 'heretics' (a category of course at least partly formulated by later Christian orthodoxies) and Jews. Early writings were often composed 'in answer' to a heretical or pagan author; Origen's *Contra Celsum* and Augustine's *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* are examples. These Patristic works can be thought of as being allied to the 'disputation' tradition, extant in early and medieval Christian literature, in which unbelievers, Jews, pagans or heretics, dispute points of doctrine with Christian characters.<sup>5</sup> The extent to which early disputation literature might have been based on real confrontations between members of opposing faiths is unclear.<sup>6</sup> In Jacobus' century, however, two historical disputations, at Paris in 1240 and at Barcelona in

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Drijvers for a discussion of Helena's depiction in the *Actus Silvestri* and possible Jewish descent, which Drijvers thinks is not historical. *Helena Augusta*, pp. 36-8.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. for example Williams' *Adversus Judaeos* for a partial listing of early Christian polemics against the Jews. Amongst those that use the dialogue format, and excluding the 'Dialogue with Trypho,' which we have already looked at, Williams cites the lost *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus* ?c. 135-178, supposed to be between a Hebrew Christian and an Alexandrian Jew, and known to Origen, (Williams, pp. 28-30), the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, ?c. 200, supposed to be a dialogue between a Christian and a Jew in Egypt, (pp. 67-78), the *Dialogue of Athanasius and Zacchaeus*, c. 325, with some resemblance to *Timothy and Aquila* (pp. 117-123, Evagrius' *Discussion Concerning the Law Between Simon a Jew and Theophilus a Christian* ?c. 400, a lively dispute full of invective, purporting to be a true record of a disputation witnessed by the author (pp. 298-305), and the *Discussion of Archbishop Gregentius with the Jew Herban*, c. 480, supposed to be 'the earliest record of a public controversy in presence of royalty' (p. 142). This last work is discussed below. Cf. also the discussion of high medieval polemics in Chapter One.

<sup>6</sup> For example, de Lange, in *Origen and the Jews*, writes, 'Much of Origen's knowledge of Judaism came from his contacts with Jews', and 'In two separate passages of the *contra Celsum* Origen recollects debates he had had with Jewish sages [1.45], and it is possible that his Discussion with the Patriarch Huillus [cited by Jerome] had a polemical motive' (p. 21). He quotes Origen as saying that

1263, generated narratives of their own. Each disputation featured a discussion between a rabbi and a Christian convert, debating whether Talmudic literature contained proofs of the existence and divinity of Christ in the same way that the Hebrew Scriptures were thought by Christians to do. The accounts of these debates, discussed below, form an interesting counterpoint to the 'Silvester' chapter of the *Legenda Aurea*, which was beginning to be disseminated late in the same century.

Another context for the 'Silvester' discussion, which is different from yet related to the miracle genre, is that of narratives concerned with magical duels. Near the close of the episode, the scholarly disputation changes into a contest of miraculous powers in which one of the Jewish scholars succeeds in killing a bull by whispering a name into its ear, and challenges the saint to bring the bull to life. The early literature dealing with supernatural duels includes the sections of the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* concerning Peter's confrontations with Simon Magus; the Jewish work *Sefer Toldoth Jeshu*, a satirical Jewish account of Jesus, using elements of the Acts of Peter and of the Christian gospels; and an intriguing episode from III Kings 18. 21-40, in which the prophet Elias (Elijah) matches his God's power against that of the pagan deity Baal. Not least amongst the resonances between these narratives is that in all of them distinctions between 'magic' and 'miracle' are explored, as our reading of the episode from the 'Silvester' chapter will show.

The chapter begins in Jacobus' usual way, giving variant etymologies of the saint's name. Jacobus then goes on to recount an attempted martyrdom of Silvester by the prefect Tarquin, and the appointment of Silvester as Bishop of Rome. Next follows a version of the tale of Constantine's baptism, according to which Constantine seeks to cure himself of leprosy by bathing in the blood of slaughtered children; however, he repents and is rewarded by a vision of Sts Peter and Paul, who tell him that Silvester will cure him of leprosy, but that in return he must 'demolish the temples of the idols, restore the Christian churches, and become a worshiper of Christ henceforth!' (*'Tu vero Christo hanc vicissitudinem reddas, ut ydolorum templa diruas, Christi restaures ecclesias et ejus deinceps cultor fias.'*)<sup>7</sup> Constantine

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he 'consulted many Jews [2.31]' (p. 25). However, the exact nature of these contacts, and whether they resembled disputations, is unclear.

<sup>7</sup> This and the following quotations from 'St Silvester' are from *GL* I, pp. 64-71; *LA*, pp. 72-9.



spends the seven days following his baptism in making laws that favour Christians, and on the eighth day begins the foundations for a new Basilica of St Peter.

The long 'disputation' episode, with which we are concerned, now follows. Constantine's mother Helena, hears of Constantine's conversion and 'upbraid[s] him roundly because he was leaving behind the God of the Jews to worship a crucified man as God' (*'dure increpat, quod relicto Deo Judaeorum crucifixum hominem Deum colat'*). Constantine tells her to gather 'the foremost doctors of the Jews' (*'Judaeorum magistros'*) and bring them to Rome to dispute with Christians 'so as to bring out the true faith by mutual discussion' (*'ut sic et disputatione mutua appareat fides vera'*). Twelve of the 'doctors' are chosen to speak, to be opposed by Silvester, and two 'Gentiles', Crato and Zenophilus, are appointed to referee the debate.

The arguments put forth by each Jewish participant are then detailed. All twelve Jews are named. The first, Abiathar, questions the doctrine of the Trinity, citing Isaiah 45. 5 'See ye that I alone am God and there is no other God besides me', (*'videte, quia ego sum solus et non est alius Deus praeter me'*). He further questions Christ's miracles as proof of his divinity, saying, 'under our Law also there have been many who worked a great number of miracles yet never dared on that account to claim for themselves the name of divinity' (*'in nostra etiam lege fuerunt multi, qui miracula plurima fecerunt et tamen nunquam ex hoc deitatis nomen sibi usurpare ausi sunt'*). Silvester quotes references to father, son and holy ghost in the Psalms, and demonstrates three in one by making three folds in 'the emperor's purple mantle,' and unfolding it to show it is 'one piece of fabric', as God is also one. (*'Accipiens purpuram imperatoris, tres ibi plicas fecit dicens [...] tres plicae sunt unus pannus, ita tres personae sunt unus Deus'*). Responding to the question of miracles, Silvester says that God punishes 'those who rose up in pride against him' (*'superbientes contra se'*), so Christ could not have lied in saying that he was God, 'since no punishment befell him as a result of his claim, which was accompanied by many a display of divine powers' (*'Quomodo ergo mentiri potuit et se Deum dicere, quod non erat, cum eum se Deum dicentem nulla poena secuta fuerit, sed virtutum efficacia comitabatur'*).

The second disputant, Jonas, says that Abraham was 'justified' through circumcision and that 'anyone who is not circumcised will not be justified'

(*'Abraham a Deo circumcisionem accipiens justificatus fuit [...] igitur qui non fuerit circumcisis, non erit justificatus'*). Silvester argues that it was not circumcision but 'faith and righteousness' that made Adam 'pleasing to God' (*'non circumcisio ipsum sanctificavit, sed fides et iustitia ipsum Deo placere fecit'*).

The third disputant, Godolias, then takes his turn, asking, 'How can your Christ be God, since you state that he was born, tempted, betrayed, stripped naked, given gall to drink, was bound, and was buried, whereas all these things are impossible in God?' (*'quomodo Christus vester potest esse Deus, cum asseratis eum esse natum, tentatum, traditum, nudatum, felle potatum, ligatum, sepultum, cum haec omnia in Deo esse non possint?'*). Again Silvester quotes Scripture, leading with Isaiah 7. 14, 'Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son' (*'ecce virgo concipiet etc. [sic]'*), and going on to cite Zechariah, the psalms, Ezra and Jeremiah as prophesying the events of Christ's life, passion and death that Godolias rejects.

Silvester is answered by the fourth Jew, Annas, who charges, 'This Silvester affirms that the things that were said of others were predicted of his Christ' (*'ea, quae de aliis dicta sunt, Silvester iste de suo Christo praedicta fuisse firmat'*), and that Silvester still must prove that the prophecies actually refer to Christ. To this Silvester replies, 'Give me someone other than Christ whom a virgin conceived, who was fed with gall, crowned with thorns, and crucified, who died and was buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven!' (*'dabis ergo alium, quam quem virgo concepit, qui felle est cibatus, spinis coronatus, crucifixus, mortuus et sepultus, qui surrexit a mortuis et ad coelos adscendit.'*) When Annas cannot name anyone, the next Jew to speak, Doeth, says that Christ should not have needed to be baptized to be sanctified, and Silvester replies that it was not to be sanctified but to sanctify.

The sixth interlocutor, Chusi, takes up the question of the virgin birth, asking for what reason Christ was born of a virgin. In answer, Silvester makes a typological link between Adam and Christ, saying that Adam was formed from 'incorrupt and virginal' earth, which 'had neither opened itself to drink human blood nor been cursed with the curse of thorns; it had not had a dead man buried in it nor been given to the serpent to eat' (*'terra, de qua Adam formatus est, incorrupta erat et virgo, quia nec se ad bibendum humanum sanguinem aperuerat nec maledictionem spinarum acceperat, nec hominis mortui sepulturam habebat, nec serpenti data*

*fuera ad edendum*'). Therefore, says Silvester, it is appropriate for Christ, as the new Adam, to be born of the Virgin Mary in order that as the serpent had conquered a man formed from the virgin earth, he might be conquered by one born of a virgin, and that he who had emerged as Adam's conqueror in paradise should become the Lord's tempter in the desert, so that having conquered Adam eating, he should be conquered by Christ fasting. (*Oportuit ergo ex Maria virgine novum Adam fieri, ut sicut serpens natum ex virgine vicerat, sic a nato ex virgine vinceretur, et qui Adae victor exstitit in paradiso, idem tentator factus est domini in deserto, ut qui Adam vicerat manducantem, vinceretur a domino jejunante.*')

Chusi then retires without response. Next, the seventh Jew, Benjamin, argues that if Christ were God he would not have been able to be tempted by the Devil. Silvester replies that 'Christ was tempted not in his divinity but as a man' (*Nos autem non in quantum Deus, sed in quantum homo, eum tentatum esse fatemur*). Furthermore 'he was tempted in three ways in order to ward off all temptations from us and to show us how to deal with them' (*Ideo autem tripliciter est tentatus, ut a nobis omnes tentationes excluderet, et formam vincendi daret*).

The eighth master, Aroel, then argues that if God is perfect it could not benefit him to be 'born in Christ' (*nascetur in Christo*'). He asks how Christ can be called 'the Word'. He then raises the question of how God, an eternal being, can be said to experience change, a function of temporal existence: 'Before he had a son, God could not be called Father; therefore if afterwards he is called Christ's Father, he has become subject to change.' (*Deus antequam haberet filium, pater dici non potuit, ergo si pater Christi postea dictus est, mutabilis factus est.*') Silvester replies that 'The son was begotten of the Father before all time, in order to create what did not yet exist, and he was born in time to remake those that had been lost' (*filius ante tempora ex patre est genitus, ut faceret, quae non erant, et in tempore est natus, ut reficeret quae perierant*'). He responds to the question of Christ's being called 'the Word' with scriptural quotations, and returns to the temporal question with two quotations, the first from the deuterocanonical apocrypha, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 24. 5, 'I came out of the mouth of the Most High, the firstborn before all creatures' (*ego ex ore altissimi prodii primogenita ante omnem creaturam*'), and the second from Prov. 8, 25 and 24, 'Before the hills I was brought forth, nor had the fountains of

waters as yet sprung out.’ (‘*ante omnes colles ego parturii, necdum fontes aquarum eruperant.*’) Silvester defends Christ as having been the Father’s Word, Wisdom and Power through eternity, and asks how then the name of Father could have been acquired by God in time (‘*Cum ergo pater nunquam fuerit sine verbo, sapientia et virtute, quomodo putas hoc nomen sibi ex tempore advenisse?*’).

The ninth disputant, Jubal, presents four questions. He asks why Christ was not born of a marriage, since the Bible does not condemn marriage; is the intent to denigrate marriage? (‘*constat, quia Deus conjugia non damnat nec iis maledixit, quare ergo de conjugio natum denegatis hunc esse, quem colitis? Nisi, ait, obfuscare conjugia studeatis*’). The second question is how the almighty can be tempted, the powerful suffer or the one who is life die (‘*Rursus quomodo tentatur, qui potens est; patitur, qui virtus est; moritur, qui vita est?*’). The third question is whether there are two sons, one begotten of the Father and the other born of the virgin (‘*Denique ad hoc cogeris, ut duos filios esse dicas, unum, quem pater genuit, alterum, quem virgo generavit*’). Lastly, Jubal asks how Christ’s assumed humanity can suffer without injury to that [his divinity], which assumed his humanity (‘*Rursus quomodo fieri potest, ut patiatur homo, qui assumptus est, sine laesione ejus, a quo assumptus est*’).

Silvester replies to the first point that marriage is not discredited, but rather honoured, since the virgin was the child of a marriage (‘*Nec hac assertionem [of the virgin birth] obfuscantur, sed ornantur conjugia, quoniam haec virgo [...] de conjugio nata est*’). To the second point he responds that Christ was tempted to vanquish the devil’s temptations, suffered to end all suffering and died to conquer death (‘*Tentatur autem Christus, ut omnes tentationes dyaboli vinceret, patitur, ut universas passiones subjiceret, moritur, ut mortis imperium subjugaret*’). To the third question Silvester says that ‘Christ is the one and only Son of God’, (‘*Dei quoque filius unus in Christo est*’), with a visible human nature and an invisible divine nature (‘*Est [...] invisibile hoc, quod est Deus, et est visibile hoc, quod est homo*’). To answer the fourth question, he uses the example of what would happen if the purple material of the emperor’s mantle were twisted:

What was twisted? The color that signifies the royal dignity, or the wool that was wool before it was dyed purple? So then, the wool stands for the man, the purple color for God. God was present in Christ’s passion when Christ

suffered on the cross, but was not subjected to suffering in any way (*quid torquebatur? hoc, quod regiae dignitatis color est, an hoc, quod lana exstiterat, antequam purpura fieret? Lanae ergo assimilatur homo, colori purpurae Deus, qui simul in passione fuit, dum pateretur in cruce, sed passioni in nullo subjacuit*).

To this the next disputant, Thara, immediately protests that the colour would be twisted with the wool (*'simul color torquetur cum lana'*). Silvester then adduces the example of 'a tree filled with the splendor of sunlight' (*'arbor habens in se solis splendorem'*); when the tree is felled, the sunlight does not suffer.

The eleventh disputant, Sileon, asks the reasons for the 'mockery, suffering and death' (*'irrisio, passionis et mortis'*) endured by Christ. Silvester gives a long list of reasons, beginning with 'Christ suffered hunger that he might feed us; he thirsted in order to quench our dryness with a life-giving draft; he was tempted to liberate us from temptation' (*'esurivit Christus, ut nos reficeret; sitivit, ut ariditati nostrae vitalia pocula ministraret, tentatus est, ut nos a tentatione liberaret'*).

This speech by Silvester concludes the disputation proper, and is applauded by spectators and participants. However, another Jewish scholar, by the name of Zambri, says, 'It's a wonder to me that you, all-wise judges, are beguiled by these ambiguous word games and allow that the omnipotence of God can be comprehended by human reason.' (*'miror vos sapientissimos iudices verborum ambagibus credere et Dei omnipotentiam aestimare humana ratione concludi'*.) He then proposes a move from words to action:

Great fools they are who worship a crucified man, for I know the name of the almighty God, a name the power of which the rocks cannot withstand and which no creature can bear to hear! And so that you may have proof that I am speaking the truth, let a wild bull be led here to me, and when I murmur that name in its ear the bull will die instantly! (*Stultissimi namque sunt, qui crucifixum colunt, cum ego nomen Dei omnipotentis sciam, cujus virtutem nec sufferunt saxa nec audire valet quaelibet creatura. Et ut me verum dicere comprobetis, taurus ad me ferocissimus adducatur et dum in ejus aure nomen istud insonuerit, taurus illico morietur.*)

Silvester enquires how Zambri can have heard the name without dying, and Zambri replies that it is a mystery that Silvester, an enemy of the Jews, cannot know.

Thereupon a bull is brought in; Zambri whispers the name in its ear and it collapses



and dies. Silvester claims that the name Zambri has uttered must be a demonic name, and that God 'not only lets the living die but also brings the dead to life' (*'Deus enim meus Jesus Christus non solum viventes mortificat, sed etiam mortuos vivificat'*). He challenges Zambri to revive the bull using the same name. The judges concur, but Zambri replies, 'Let Silvester awaken it in the name of Jesus the Galilean, and we will all believe in Jesus, for even if Silvester can sprout wings and fly, he cannot do this!' (*'suscitet eum Silvester in nomine Jesu Galilei et omnes in eum credemus. Nam etsi pennis posset volare, istud tamen non valeret perficere'*). The Jews promise to convert if Silvester succeeds. The saint prays, and says, 'O name of malediction and death, come forth at the command of our lord Jesus Christ, in whose name I say to you:<sup>8</sup> Bull, arise and return tamed to your herd!' (*'o nomen maledictionis et mortis egredere jussu domini nostri Jesu Christi, in cujus nomine tibi dico: taure, surge et ad armentum tuum mansuetus recede'*). The bull recovers, and 'the queen, the Jews, the judges, and everybody else were converted to the faith' (*'tunc regina, Judaei, judices et caeteri omnes conversi sunt in fidem'*).

This concludes the disputation episode. Jacobus follows it with a story in which some pagan priests boast to Constantine that a dragon they keep within a pit (*fovea*) has killed three hundred people a day with its breath since the emperor adopted Christianity. Silvester vows to overcome the dragon by the power of Christ, and the priests promise, in this case, to convert. Silvester prays, and the Holy Ghost instructs him to say to the dragon

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin, crucified, and buried, who rose again and is seated at the right hand of the Father, is to come to judge the living and the dead. Therefore you, Satan, wait for him here in this pit until he comes. (*Dominus noster Jesus Christus de virgine natus, crucifixus et sepultus, qui resurrexit et sedet ad dextram patris, hic venturus est judicare vivos et mortuos. Tu ergo Sathana cum in hac fovea, dum venerit, exspecta.*)

Silvester is also instructed to tie up the dragon's mouth with a thread and seal it with a ring with a cross on it. After performing these tasks, Silvester and his assistants meet two magicians (*magos*), who had followed them into the pit in order to see whether they had in fact gone to the dragon. The magicians are nearly dead from the

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<sup>8</sup> The foregoing portion of Silvester's utterance is omitted in Ryan: this translation is by Michael L.



dragon's breath. Silvester rescues the two, who, along with 'a countless multitude, (*multitudine infinita*)' then convert. 'Thus', says Jacobus, 'the Roman people were delivered from a twofold death, namely, from the worship of the devil and the dragon's venom (*sicque romanorum populus a duplici morte liberatus, scilicet a cultura daemonis et veneno draconis*)'. Jacobus then briefly recounts Silvester's peaceful death.

As the 'discussion' episode is based on an early Christian source, the fifth- to sixth-century *Life of Silvester*, it is not surprising that it draws upon the themes of early Christian apologetics. For example, the status of the Mosaic Law with regard to Christian thought and practice was one of the principal Patristic themes. Christ said

Do not think that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but *to fulfill*. (Matt. 5. 17)

Yet, Christians had abandoned many of the precepts of the Law, including dietary prohibitions and circumcision. The authors of early Christian apologetics and polemics attempted to justify this fact by saying that Christians were following the spirit, but not the letter, of the Old Law.

The question of circumcision is raised in 'Silvester'. When the second Jewish doctor argues that 'anyone who is not circumcised will not be justified', Silvester replies:

We know that before being circumcised Abraham pleased God and was called God's friend. Therefore it was not circumcision that sanctified him but his faith and righteousness that made him pleasing to God. He did not receive circumcision to sanctify him but to mark him with a difference. (*constat Abraham ante circumcisionem Deo placuisse et amicum Dei appellatum esse, igitur non circumcisio ipsum sanctificavit, sed fides et iustitia ipsum Deo placere fecit; non igitur accepit circumcisionem in sanctificationem sed in distinctionem*).<sup>9</sup>

Turning to the Patristic texts, we find that Justin Martyr, in the 'Dialogue with Trypho', brings out the same arguments in the same order:

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<sup>9</sup> *GL* I, p. 66.

[...] when Abraham himself was still uncircumcised, he was justified and blessed by God because of his faith in Him, as the Scriptures tell us. Furthermore, the Scriptures and the facts of the case force us to admit that Abraham received circumcision for a sign, not for justification itself.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Tertullian in 'An Answer to the Jews':

'But Abraham,' you say, 'was circumcised'. [Yes,] but he pleased God before his circumcision [...] he had 'accepted' circumcision; but such as was to be for 'a sign' of that time, not for a prerogative title to salvation. (*Sed Abraham, inquit, circumcisisus est. Sed ante Deo placuit quam circumcideretur [...] Acceperat enim circumcisionem, sed quae esset in signum temporis illius, non in salutis praerogativam.*)<sup>11</sup>

And finally, Augustine:

'Abraham believed in God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' The apostle mentions this lest the circumcised should boast, and refuse to admit uncircumcised peoples to the faith of Christ. For when these promises were made, when Abraham's faith 'was accounted to him for righteousness', he had not yet been circumcised. (*'Credidit Abraham Deo, et deputatum est illi ad justitiam' [...] ne circumcisio gloriaretur, gentesque incircumcisas ad fidem Christi nollet admitti. Hoc enim quando factum est, ut credenti Abrahae deputaretur fides ad justitiam, nondum fuerat circumcisisus.*)<sup>12</sup>

As Augustine's text suggests, the proposition that physical circumcision has been replaced with a spiritual equivalent is derived from Paul: 'But he is a Jew, that is one inwardly; and the circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Romans 2. 29).' The argument appears in one form or another in works as early as the *Epistle of Barnabas* (c.70 CE -135 CE), which states that 'Abraham, the first to perform circumcision, was looking ahead in the Spirit to Jesus when he circumcised'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> 'Dialogue with Trypho', 23, p. 183.

<sup>11</sup> Tertullian, 'An Answer to the Jews', in *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianis*, ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Christian Library 18, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Clark, 1869-70), III (1870), pp. 201-58 (3, p. 207). Latin: 'Adversus Judaeos', in *Quinti Septimii Florentis Tertulliani, Presbyteri Carthaginensis, Opera Omnia*, PL 2 (Paris: Migne, 1866), cols 633A-682C (595-642 in 1844 edn), 3, col. 640.

<sup>12</sup> *City of God*, 16.23, p. 730; *De civitate Dei*, 16.23, PL 41, col. 500. Cf. Gen. 15. 6, Rom. 4. 3 and Gal. 3. 6.

<sup>13</sup> 'The Epistle of Barnabas', in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. by Bart D. Ehrman, Loeb Classical Library 24-5, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 3-91 (II, 9, p. 45).

The argument about circumcision was repeated for good reasons. Christian insistence that many of the strictures of Jewish Law were obsolete in terms of literal practice, but had gained a new, Christian, spiritual significance, was a keynote of the argument that Christianity was the legitimate heir of the Jewish religious tradition. The argument also answered possible Jewish objections to the Christian abandonment of much of Mosaic Law, and justified the Pauline and early proselytising policy of dissociating the Jewish sect of Christian believers from many of the practices enjoined by Mosaic law, thus making the sect more attractive to Gentile converts. It was thus an argument of some importance in Patristic writings. But the similarity of the form of the argument in the Silvester episode, Justin, and Tertullian, argues that the original author of the Silvester episode was familiar with these or similar texts.

It seems clear that the 'Silvester' discussion reproduces, in a greatly abbreviated fashion, elements of early Christian thought that are used with apologetic intent. Yet the Silvester material does more than this. 'Silvester' weaves Christian apologetic material into dramatic form, introducing historical characters (although not necessarily with historical realism) and highlighting the element of dialogue. The arguments of the Fathers are put into the mouth, not only of an early Christian saint, but one who was associated with the triumph of Christianity in Rome, and its victory over paganism and Judaism. Readers are presented with a vivid scene in which Christological rhetoric is shown not only defeating the Jews, but also being declared valid by pagan judges. This scenario symbolises the rejection of Judaism and adoption of Christianity by pagan Rome and later all of Europe. The lengthy apologetics of the Fathers were potentially made more accessible to a range of early and medieval readers by being reworked in 'Silvester', and the dramatic narrative setting highlights the political context of the theological arguments.

The drama is heightened by Jacobus' portrayal of the Jewish disputants as having difficulty in responding to Silvester's points, so that Silvester defeats them easily and definitively. This can be seen clearly if we compare the responses of Trypho the Jew in Justin's 'Dialogue with Trypho', which shares with the Silvester legend a dialogic format, Jewish characters involved in a scholarly religious dispute with Christians, and some similar (as well as dissimilar) rhetoric and themes. We can

compare the Jewish characters' response in both works to the claim that prophecies of Christ are to be found in the Jewish scriptures. When Silvester quotes Isaiah, Zecharias, and three of the psalms in support of the events of Christ's life and death, his opponent Godolias is silenced. When the next disputant, Annas, objects, like Trypho, that it is still to be proved that these prophecies refer to Christ, Silvester asks him who else he can name who (among other things) was born of a virgin, crucified and rose again. To this Annas does not reply, and when Constantine says: 'If he can give us no one else, let him admit he has lost the argument' (*'Si alium non dederit, sciat se superatum'*), Annas retires without further objection.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, Trypho's objections to Justin's arguments are given some prominence in the 'Dialogue'. An example is his response when Justin argues that prophecies of Christ are to be found in the Jewish scriptures. Justin quotes Psalm 109. 1-7, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit Thou at My right hand' as a prophecy of Christ, adding, 'I know that you dare to refer the [...] Psalm to king Ezichias, but [...] you are wrong.'<sup>15</sup> He goes on to argue that the psalm refers to someone who is 'a priest forever', which does not apply to Ezechias, but does apply to Christ, who is God's 'eternal priest'.<sup>16</sup> Justin then quotes a further Psalm, Ps. 18. 7, 'Give to the king Thy judgment, O God', saying that 'you [Trypho, or Jews in general] claim that the words were spoken of Solomon, because he was a king, whereas the words clearly proclaim that they were spoken of the eternal King, that is, Christ'.<sup>17</sup>

Although he has not initiated this discussion, when presented with these arguments, Trypho resists. While agreeing that the messianic prophecies refer to a suffering Christ (that is, messiah), Trypho is still hesitant to accept that the prophecies refer to the Jesus whom the Christians put forward in this role:

It may also be admitted that this is exactly as you say, and that the Prophets predicted that Christ was to suffer [...] and that He would henceforth be the Judge of all men, and the Eternal King and Priest. But prove to us that Jesus Christ is the one about whom these prophecies were spoken.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *GL* I, p. 67; *LA*, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> 'Dialogue with Trypho', Ch. 33, pp. 196-7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 36, p. 202.

Justin attempts to do so with further scriptural exegesis; but Trypho insists that his conception of the messiah is blasphemous,<sup>19</sup> and when Justin, in the course of his explanations, suggests that although the Jews suffer from ‘stubborn prejudice’, some among them convert and receive grace from Christ, Trypho retorts, ‘Don’t you realise [...] that you are out of your mind to say such things?’<sup>20</sup>

It is difficult to determine to what extent Trypho’s responses and attitudes might have reflected those of historical Jewish communities of Justin’s time.<sup>21</sup> It is certainly possible to view him entirely as an invented character.<sup>22</sup> However, Justin’s inclusion of the unflattering comments of Trypho and Trypho’s reluctance to accept Christian doctrines give the piece an air of verisimilitude, as does his evident exasperation at some of Trypho’s objections. By Chapter 64, Justin’s patience with Trypho is beginning to fray: when Trypho declares that even if Christ *is* professed to be the ‘Lord and Christ and God’ by the Gentiles, there is no reason for the Jews to worship him, Justin abandons his formerly calm tone and retorts, ‘Trypho [...], if I were as contentious and shallow-brained as you, I would have discontinued this discussion long ago, for you make no effort to understand my arguments, but only rack your brain to make any kind of reply.’<sup>23</sup> Yet we get the sense that Trypho is not being demonised; he too is clearly frustrated by what he sees as Christian appropriation of Jewish (and pagan) religiosity, and his reactions in accusing Justin of blasphemy and insanity are given a light, almost humorous touch, which Justin’s text at least preserves, even if it does not invent it.<sup>24</sup>

This presents a striking contrast to later Christian reactions to Jewish unbelief. Chrysostom, for example, the early Christian thinker most notorious for anti-Jewish sentiment, saw as part of his purpose to ‘stitch shut the mouths of the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Ch. 38, pp. 204-5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Ch. 39, pp. 206-7.

<sup>21</sup> The scholarly debate over Trypho’s historicity is summarised in Timothy J. Horner, *Listening to Trypho: Justin Martyr’s Dialogue Reconsidered* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 16-32. Horner finds a lack of consensus, and presents a case for Trypho as ‘an authentic Jewish voice’ (p. 193, and cf. especially his chapter vii, ‘Trypho in context’, pp. 167-193). He makes an important point about the ‘differing degrees of reality’ that may be applied to the analysis of Trypho, saying that his historicity and his function in the dialogue should be assessed as separate quantities (p. 16).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Horner on ‘the unreal Trypho,’ pp. 26-9, citing scholars who have viewed Trypho as ‘a straw man,’ subservient to Justin’s ‘apologetic agenda’ (p. 27).

<sup>23</sup> ‘Dialogue with Trypho’, Ch. 64, p. 249.

<sup>24</sup> On ‘Trypho’s wit’, cf. Horner, pp. 126-130.



Jews',<sup>25</sup> whereas 'Trypho' offers a mouthpiece for a dissenting Jewish voice.

Chrysostom sees the Jewish voice as being inadmissible, because tainted with the crime of deicide. He imagines a Jewish response to Christ's testimony regarding the destruction of the temple:

But the Jew totally rejects this testimony. He refuses to admit what Christ said. What does the Jew say? 'The man who said this is my foe. I crucified him. So how am I to accept his testimony?'<sup>26</sup>

By contrast with this intransigent attitude, Justin's portrayal of Trypho makes Trypho's antagonism, though persistent, seem human and legitimate.

It should be noted that Jacobus, in portraying the Jews as surrendering almost without argument, differs somewhat from the Latin *Vita Silvestri*, cited here in the edition of Mombricitus.<sup>27</sup> Jacobus' text shortens the discussion, omitting or conflating much of Silvester's argument as well as many of the Jewish responses. It is unclear whether Jacobus did this only for reasons of space, or whether his omission of nearly all of the Jewish objections to Silvester had the purpose of enhancing the dignity and the power of the saint. It is certainly true that many instances in which the Jews are resistant to Silvester's points are found in Mombricitus, but not in Jacobus. For example, in Mombricitus, Chusi, having agreed with Silvester that the earth from which Adam was made was 'incorrupt', balks at the equation Silvester makes between 'incorrupt' and 'virgin', asking, 'How was it virgin?'<sup>28</sup> ('*quomodo uirgo erat?*') Silvester says, 'If it was incorrupt, it was virgin' ('*Si incorrupta erat: uirgo erat*'). Chusi again objects, 'I do not know in which part you can say that it was

<sup>25</sup> *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, 5.1.6, p. 99. In 5.1.5, Chrysostom promises to show his audience how 'you, too, can silence and gag the Jews' (p. 98).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.1.7, p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> The assumption is made here that the 'discussion' episode in Jacobus is at least partially based upon the *Vita Silvestri*. It follows the arguments and wording of the 'discussion' in the *Vita Silvestri*, but in a shortened form, truncating, and in some cases obscuring, the arguments. Maggione, the editor of the recent Latin edition of the *Legenda*, gives the *Vita S.*, for which they cite the edition of Mombricitus, as a source for the 'Silvester' chapter (*Legenda Aurea*, p. 108). Duchesne, as discussed above, believed the Latin version of the *Vita S.*, of which Mombricitus is the only edition, to be the earliest, dating from the late fifth century. (*Liber Pontificalis*, I, pp. cix-cxii.) But whether the Latin, Greek or Syriac version is the original, the work clearly predates Jacobus by many centuries. Thus, even though Mombricitus' edition is dated c. 1475, the Latin *Vita S.* is a plausible source for Jacobus to have drawn upon. A modern edition of Mombricitus, from 1910, is cited here: Bonino Mombrizio (Mombricitus), 'Silvester papa et confessor', in *Sanctuarium seu vitae sanctorum*, 2 vols (Paris: Fontemoing, 1910), II, pp. 508-31.



incorrupt or virgin' (*'ignoro ad quam partem incorruptam aut uirginem dicas'*).<sup>29</sup>

Silvester's subsequent arguments convince Chusi, and draw cries of praise from the assembled company. At this, Benjamin remarks,

It is not yet time to praise Silvester, for we have a great many more objections to make. When, therefore, we are satisfied on all points, we also shall applaud and leap up in praise of his victory. (*'adhuc tempus laudandi Syluestri non est: sunt enim plurima: quae obiiciamus: Cum ergo de uniuersis in laudem satisfactum fuerit: et ipsi manus dantes in laudibus eius uictoriae prosiliemus.'*)<sup>30</sup>

At another point, Godolias sharply rebukes Silvester, saying, 'I am surprised at the presumption of a Gentile usurping to himself a knowledge of our law' (*'miror inquit frontem gentilis hominis legis nostrae sibi scientiam usurpantem'*).<sup>31</sup> Near the end of the episode, while Jacobus simply states that the Jews all promise to believe if Silvester revives the bull, Mombritius gives each Jew a speech on the subject, and many of the speeches openly express ridicule and disbelief. Benjamin, for example, says, 'It is nothing but laughable to the minds of the onlookers, who see this bull lying there all swollen and dead, with its eyes popping out of their sockets, that we should believe that it could come alive at the invocation of a crucified man.' (*'nunquid non risum mentibus aspectantium: qui uident taurum oculis egressis de loco suo iacentem totum tumidum et mortuum: ut hunc credamus ad inuocationem hominis crucifixi posse resurgere?'*)<sup>32</sup> And Silvester too is given a moment of exasperation, saying to Jonas, 'Do not throw your circumlocutions at me! All you do is to escape as fast as you can, like a slippery snake, and constantly evade my questions.' (*'noli mihi anfractus obiicere: et quasi anguis lubricus quo citius coarctaris effugere: atque ab interrogationibus non finitis abscedere.'*)

In Mombritius, much as we saw in Justin's 'Dialogue with Trypho', the tone of the debate descends at times almost to squabbling, making the participants on both sides seem human and fallible. Jacobus' version of the discussion omits almost all of the contention, objection and persistence of the Jewish disputants, as well as

<sup>28</sup> This and the following English translations of Mombritius are by Michael L. Kay.

<sup>29</sup> Mombritius, p. 521.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 520.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 527.

Silvester's somewhat tetchy response, given above. Jacobus' Silvester remains an austere figure, and, as he is seen to achieve persuasion by means of a minimum of argument, his power is emphasised. The Jewish scholars in Jacobus lack even the perhaps limited realistic qualities of the Jews in Mombritius or of Trypho, appearing (except for Zambri) as one-dimensional symbols of the obsolete Mosaic Law, and of Jewish failure to embrace a Christological interpretation of scripture.

However, despite the greater emphasis on Jewish objections and resistance to Christian argument in Mombritius, the outline of the story is the same as it is in Jacobus. Both Mombritius and Jacobus show the Jews, whether immediately or more gradually, being silenced by Silvester's arguments. In both, their ultimate defeat and subsequent conversion follow the miracle performed by the saint. Thus, both versions differ significantly from the 'Dialogue with Trypho', in which Trypho remains unconvinced to the end. In both Mombritius and Jacobus, the Jews lose the arguments definitively, demonstrating the weakness of the Old Law and its continued adherents in the Christian era. To make sure that no doubt remains, the debate is terminated by the miraculous denouement.

The literary device of a miraculous climax to a debate resolves any ambiguities remaining in texts as to the victor. Historically, however, the ending of a debate could leave behind unresolved issues. In order to understand this, we can look at the two famous Christian-Jewish disputations that took place in Jacobus' century. The first was in Paris in 1240, between the convert Nicholas Donin and Rabbi Yehiel, and the second in Barcelona in 1263 between the convert Paul Christian (otherwise Paulo, Paulus or Pablo Christiani) and Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, or Nahmanides (sometimes spelt 'Nachmanides').<sup>33</sup> There is no suggestion that these disputations, the second of which occurred after the probable date of the *Legenda* (c. 1260), directly influenced Jacobus' compilation. Jacobus' version of the Silvester legend is, as we have seen, thought to be based on a much earlier text.

However, it is still interesting to view the Silvester episode against the historical disputations occurring in the century in which Jacobus' version of the Silvester legend began to circulate. This gives us an opportunity to compare a disputation as presented in a popular miracle tale with two disputations that occurred

in actuality, and to suggest the role of the miracle in offering narrative closure to such an event, whose historical counterparts may have resulted in a much more ambiguous outcome. It may be argued that it is difficult to compare historical events (or historians' reconstructions of events), like the disputations, to a 'fictional' (from our perspective) narrative like the 'Silvester' episode. However, the disputations generated contemporary texts of their own, with Jewish and Christian accounts of both the Paris<sup>34</sup> and the Barcelona<sup>35</sup> disputations. These give perhaps a better basis for comparison. While these accounts clearly belong to a different genre than the disputation-miracle tale, all describe the arguments and responses in a Jewish-Christian debate. In the historical accounts, we can look for differences between perceptions of how the debate went from the Jewish and Christian sides, and see whether the Christian accounts have parallels to the 'Silvester' legend.

The subject of these debates differed somewhat from the subject of the early 'disputation' literature we have looked at, as well as the disputation in the 'Silvester' episode. While attempts to prove the divinity of Christ and the truth of Christianity were still on the agenda of the Christian disputants, these things were to be proved

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<sup>33</sup> A third famous disputation took place in Tortosa in 1413-14, but since this is considerably later in date we will not examine it here.

<sup>34</sup> For a paraphrase and discussion of Yeḥiel's Hebrew account of the Paris disputation, cf. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, pp. 69-73. Another paraphrase, highlighting different points, is Yeḥiel of Paris, 'The 'Vikuah' of R. Yeḥiel of Paris: A Paraphrase', in Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (London: Associated University Presses, 1982), pp. 153-62. Cohen and Maccoby translate Yeḥiel ben Joseph, *Vikuah Rabbenu Yeḥiel mi-Paris*, ed. by Samuel Grünbaum (Thorn [n. pub.], 1873). For a translation of the Christian account, cf. 'The Christian Account of the Paris Disputation', in Maccoby, pp. 163-7. Maccoby cites Isadore Loeb, 'La controverse de 1240 sur le Talmud', *Revue des études juives*, I-III, and the MS, *Extractiones de Talmut*, Bibliothèque Nationale, no. 16, 558, fo. 231. Also cf. Maccoby's discussion of the disputation, pp. 19-38.

<sup>35</sup> For a translation of the Jewish account of the Barcelona disputation, cf. 'The 'Vikuah' of Nahmanides: Translation and Commentary', in Maccoby, pp. 97-146. Maccoby translates the Jewish account of Nahmanides, *Wikkuach ha-Ramban b'inyan ha-emunah liphne melek w'sarim u-beur ha-Ramban 'al hinneh jaskil 'abdi: Nachmanidis Disputatio publica pro fide Judaica* (a.1263) e Codd. MSS recognita, addita ejusdem expositione in Jesaiam LIII edidit M. Steinschneider, Berolini, 1860. For a translation of the Christian account, cf. 'The Christian Account of the Barcelona Disputation', in Maccoby, pp. 147-50. Maccoby cites Yitzhak Baer, 'On the Disputations of R. Yeḥiel of Paris and R. Moses ben Nahman (Hebrew), *Tarbiz*, II (1930-31), 172-87. Also cf. Maccoby's discussion of the disputation, pp. 39-75. In his translation of Nahmanides, Maccoby comments on and corrects variant readings in another translation, 'The Disputation of Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Ramban) with Fra Paulo Christiani on the Subject of the Jewish Faith and Held in Public before King Jayme I of Aragon in July anno 1263', trans. by Oliver Shaw Rankin, *Jewish Religious Polemic of Early and Later Centuries: A Study of Documents Here Rendered into English* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1956), pp. 178-210 and 228-35. Cf. also Rankin's introduction to the debate, pp.157-75. Chazan, in *Church, State and Jew in the Middle Ages*, has another translation of the Christian account (pp. 266-9), as well as a

with reference to the Talmud, the existence of which was increasingly being viewed by the Christian majority as a threat. Cohen sees the Maimonidean controversy<sup>36</sup> of the thirteenth century as the starting-point of a Christian awareness that certain Jewish books might be considered 'heretical', that is, as a departure from a Jewish orthodoxy, rather than from Christianity.<sup>37</sup> When the convert Nicholas Donin brought the texts and exegesis of rabbinic Judaism to the attention of Gregory IX in 1236, the era of Christian denouncing and burning of the Talmud began.<sup>38</sup> In the Paris disputation, Nicholas Donin accused the Talmud of blasphemy and anti-Christian hostility as part of a campaign to destroy this branch of Jewish religious literature.<sup>39</sup> In the Barcelona disputation, Paul Christian, in response to the still-pressing Christian need to prove, over the objection of the Jews, that Christ was the Messiah, attempted to demonstrate this from both the Bible and the Talmud. In both disputations, the participants cite Talmud as well as Tanakh. Thus, despite some inevitable similarities, the arguments put forth do not resemble those of the 'Silvester' disputation as closely as do some of the arguments of Patristic apologetics. However, our concern is not so much with the individual arguments, which are too lengthy to describe here in detail, but with the tone the accounts take in describing the Jewish and Christian participants, and the differences in Jewish and Christian perceptions as to which side has the victory when the debate closes.

As in the case of Justin's Trypho, it is noticeable that, as a disputant, Rabbi Yehiel is more insistent on his stance than are the Jewish doctors of the Silvester legend. He states, against those who would punish the Jews in France and attack the Talmud, the unassailability of the Jewish law because of its geographical spread: 'We and this our law are dispersed throughout the whole world [...] in Babylonia, Persia, Greece, the lands of Islam, and the seventy nations beyond the rivers of Ethiopia – there this law of ours will still be found.'<sup>40</sup> Here he reminds the Christian

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translation of Nahmanides' account, with significant omissions (pp. 269-76). Cohen discusses the disputation in *The Friars and the Jews*, pp. 108-28.

<sup>36</sup> The Jewish scholarly world of the thirteenth century became divided into supporters of the works of Moses Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, d.1204), and those who found his work, in Jeremy Cohen's words, 'guilty of rationalist, heresy-inducing scepticism'. For an overview of the controversy, cf. *The Friars and the Jews*, pp. 52-60 (quotation p. 53).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 60 ff.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., esp. pp. 66-74.

<sup>40</sup> Cohen, p. 70, citing Yehiel, *Wikkuah*, p. 2.

audience not only that Judaism exists within the boundaries of Christendom, but that it and other religions exist outside those boundaries. Particularly of note is Yehiel's counteraccusation against Christian perceptions of Talmudic 'heresy'. The Talmud, he says, so far from being novel and heretical, has been central to Jewish religion since the early Christian era. It is Donin himself, the 'apostate', who is heretical and has been anathematised by the Jewish community.<sup>41</sup> He accuses Donin of 'malicious slander' against his former co-religionists.<sup>42</sup>

We have already noted how, in Jacobus' version of 'Silvester,' the Jewish disputants frequently fail to answer Silvester's points. With the Jewish arguments instantly defeated, the 'Silvester' disputation unambiguously represents a Christian triumph. In contrast, Yehiel's report problematises the outcome of the Paris disputation. The fact that Yehiel's account was written at all, and that it recorded his viewpoint for posterity, means that, unlike the Jews of 'Silvester', he never saw himself as defeated by the Christian arguments, and certainly did not convert following the disputation; more, that he wanted his version of the discussion to be known, at least among his fellow Jews.

The same could be said of Nahmanides, who states his position early and forcefully, managing not only to throw doubt onto the possibility of any Christological interpretation of the Talmud, but also to make apparent his disapproval of Jews who convert to Christianity:

Fray Paul opened and said that he would show from our Talmud that the Messiah about whom the prophets testified had already come.

I replied, 'Before we argue about this, I should like you to instruct me by telling me how this is possible. For ever since Fray Paul went around in Provence and in many other places, I have heard that he has been saying something like this, and I found it very surprising. Let him answer me this: does he wish to say that the Sages of the Talmud were believers in Jesus' Messiahship, and that they believed that he was not merely human, but truly divine, as Christians think? [...] If these Sages believed in the Messiahship of Jesus and that he and his faith and religion of Jews, and if they wrote the things from which Fray Paul says he will prove this, if so how did they remain in the original religion and practice of Judaism? For they were Jews and remained in the Jewish religion all their lives and died as Jews, they and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-70.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, p. 71, citing Yehiel, p. 3.



their sons and their pupils who listened to all their words from their own mouths.’<sup>43</sup>

Here Naḥmanides paints a portrait of a Jewish scholarly community with a religiosity that exists on its own terms, without reference to Christianity. He depicts this religiosity as being handed down, not only through texts but through oral transmission, to Jewish ‘pupils’.

This is reminiscent of the idea, discussed in Chapter Four, of secret traditions among the Jews, related to possible initiatory material given by Jesus to his Jewish disciples, and thus also having a bearing on the idea of apostolic succession. Here, however, what Naḥmanides defends is a Jewish transmission unrelated to Christianity, alive, flourishing and loyally adhered to. The degree of threat this represented to his Christian hearers must have equalled that which Naḥmanides obviously felt with regard to Jewish apostasy; he twice insists that the Talmudic scholars ‘died as Jews’, a clear reproach to the convert Paul.<sup>44</sup>

The indignant tone of Naḥmanides’ complaint against Paul recalls Trypho telling Justin that he is out of his mind to believe the things he does. Throughout the arguments, which are mainly concerned with rival interpretations of Talmudic passages, Naḥmanides presents himself as someone who has a superior grasp of his material, who does not mince his words, who treats his opponent with a fair degree of irony, and who generally manages to have the last word. He even (after the public dispute, during a royal visit to the synagogue) challenges the king himself, although with a courteous preamble, saying, ‘the words of our lord the King are noble, exalted and honoured’. He adds:

But I will not give his words the praise of saying that they are true. For I have clear proofs, and arguments that shine like the sun, to show that the truth is not in accordance with his words [...]<sup>45</sup>

Naḥmanides brings up a point about which he ‘wonder[s] very much’, namely that Jesus, using similar arguments to those the King adduces, told ‘our forefathers’ that

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<sup>43</sup> Naḥmanides, ‘Vikuah’, in Maccoby, p. 104.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 143.



he was the Messiah, 'yet they denied it with a complete and strong denial'. He goes on:

And if our forefathers, who saw him and knew him, did not listen to him, how shall we believe and listen to the voice of the King, who has no knowledge of the matter except through a remote report which he has heard from people who did not know Jesus and were not from his land like our forefathers, who knew him and were eye-witnesses?<sup>46</sup>

Again, Naḥmanides insists on the value of the Jews as witnesses of Christ, as we saw in the 'Finding' legend, but to opposite effect, giving authority to Jewish disbelief in the divinity of Christ. Naḥmanides uses extremely forthright language in stating his case, yet he does not record that the king had any negative reaction to being thus put in his place by a Jew. Perhaps there was none to record, since Naḥmanides has already related how, a week earlier, the king told him, 'I have never seen a man who was in the wrong argue so well as you did'.<sup>47</sup>

Naḥmanides frequently depicts Paul as the inferior in debate. Although both sides, with other friars and the king sometimes intervening on the Christian side, are not in general slow in taking up each other's points, Naḥmanides once refers to Paul as being 'put to silence',<sup>48</sup> and at another time says 'Fray Paul did not answer a word'.<sup>49</sup> At one point he says to Paul:

You have not proved that [the Messiah] has come, for I have refuted all the vain arguments which you have adduced. Thus I have won my case, for the onus of proof is on you [...].<sup>50</sup>

He also says after one of his points, 'I said this in order to show to them all that Fray Paul did not know how to read the book [*Midrash Bereshith Rabbah*] which he had cited, since he erred in the matter of understanding the style'.<sup>51</sup>

Yet when we turn to the short Latin account of the same disputation,<sup>52</sup> which omits virtually all of the argument, we find that 'Moses the Jew', at various points

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 141-2.

recorded in a very brief summary of the debate, ‘conceded’, ‘was not able to reply’, ‘was silent, and so, by his silence, assented’, was ‘defeated by irrefutable proofs and authorities’ and ‘was able to make no reply’.<sup>53</sup> The account states that

Further, since he could not reply and had been defeated many times in public, and both Jews and Christians were treating him with scorn, he said obstinately in front of everyone that he would not reply at all [...] Though he had promised in the presence of the Lord King and many others that he would answer questions on his faith and law to a small gathering, when the Lord King was away from the state he secretly fled away and departed. From this it is plain that he does not dare and is not able to defend his erroneous creed.<sup>54</sup>

This testimony is sealed by the king: ‘We, James, [...] truly confess and recognise that each and every one of the words and deeds in our presence and of many others were as is contained above in this present writing’.<sup>55</sup>

Yet compare Naḥmanides’ version of the ending of the disputation. He says that upon the conclusion of the public debate,

I heard in the court that it was the wish of the King and the Preaching Friars to visit the synagogue on the Sabbath, so I was kept in the city for eight more days.<sup>56</sup>

There is some further disputation between Naḥmanides, the king and the Dominicans in the synagogue. Following this, Naḥmanides relates,

On the following day, I stood before our lord the King, and he said to me, ‘Return to your city in life and peace’. And he gave me 300 dinars, and I took my leave of him with great love.<sup>57</sup>

Far from slinking away, Naḥmanides portrays himself as being paid and given honourable dismissal by the king, whom, in contrast to the apostate and the other Dominicans, who are clearly opponents, he sees as a potential source of support. According to Maccoby, the gift of money is confirmed in a contemporary document,

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<sup>52</sup> ‘The Christian Account of the Barcelona Disputation’, in Maccoby, pp. 147-50.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-9.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Naḥmanides, ‘Vikuah’, in Maccoby, p. 142.

which seems to support Naḥmanides' version; Maccoby speculates that the King may have signed the Latin account without having read it.<sup>58</sup>

Regarding the outcome of the debate, Rankin comments that 'naturally enough both sides, the Dominicans and the Jews, claimed "the victory"'.<sup>59</sup> Naḥmanides published his account after the disputation had finished, and was subsequently brought in front of a 'special commission', charged with 'having reviled Christ and the Catholic Faith in a book'.<sup>60</sup> Naḥmanides claimed to have been allowed 'permission to exercise full freedom of speech'<sup>61</sup> at the disputation, but the commission felt this did not extend to publication. He was sentenced to two years' banishment and the burning of his report. Rankin remarks that this represented leniency on the part of the king, who may have wished to get Naḥmanides out of the way until the controversy died away, and appointed a commission of his own rather than hand him over to a Dominican tribunal.<sup>62</sup> However, following a bull from Clement IV in 1266 or 67, trying to get the king to recognise the importance of 'punishing the Jew who had spread abroad his errors in various regions after his controversy with Fra Paulo',<sup>63</sup> Naḥmanides was banished for life, and left for Palestine in 1267.

Although the Christians may have felt that they had won the debate, Naḥmanides' account attempted to prove the opposite. The Christian and Jewish versions of the Barcelona debate may be seen as 'counterhistorical', to use Amos Funkenstein's term. According to Funkenstein, the counterhistory is 'a specific genre of history written since antiquity', with a 'polemical' function. A counterhistorical text uses techniques of re-inscription and inversion in order to 'distort [...] the adversary's self image'. Funkenstein says that the counterhistorical method 'consists of the systematic exploitation of the adversary's most trusted sources against their grain'.<sup>64</sup> In these terms, the Christian attempt to prove Christian truths through the Talmud, like the attempts of the Fathers to do the same using Jewish scripture, is in

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Rankin, p. 171.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 172-3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

itself creating a counterhistorical narrative. We can also see the Christian and Jewish accounts of the debate as counterhistories of one another, each trying to invert and re-inscribe the other's sense of identity. Each text portrays the opponent as incompetent and easily silenced, while the debater the account favours is shrewd, knowledgeable and persuasive. We can see Yehiel's text as similarly counterhistorical, since it refutes the notion of Talmudic learning being heretical vis-à-vis Judaism, and instead says that it is Donin who is the heretic.

The readers' perception of the characters of Nahmanides and Paul varies depending on whether the Latin or the Hebrew report is consulted. The character of the disputants, whether bold or timid, authoritative or confused, is clearly seen by both chroniclers as emblematic of the truth of their respective arguments. Thus, we are not only being told that Nahmanides or Paul is effective in debate, but that Nahmanides or Paulo is defending the truth. The 'truths' of Christianity and Judaism are clearly seen by the chroniclers as incompatible, as each re-inscribes the texts and statements of the other with a different meaning. Thus, it was not likely, in contemporary terms, that Nahmanides' and Paul's viewpoints could have been seen as different, yet equally valid. To both sides it must have seemed that only one could be correct. Yet, the existence of two counterhistorical texts, each rewriting the arguments of the other, constitutes a threat to both sides' perception of victory. Rankin cites Graetz as saying that Nahmanides produced his report precisely to counter the Dominican claim to have won the debate.<sup>65</sup> The Christian authorities responded by banishing Nahmanides and sentencing his text to be burnt.

However, these tactics may not fully have resolved the situation from the Christian point of view. Chazan says that Barcelona was not a debate between equal parties, but a Christian attempt to 'bring the message of Christianity to the Jews'. He cites the Latin report, which says that the king and the friars debated 'not that the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ – which because of its certitude cannot be placed in dispute – be put in the center of attention with the Jews as uncertain, but that the truth of that faith be made manifest by destroying the Jews' errors and in order to

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<sup>64</sup> Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). p. 36.

<sup>65</sup> Rankin, p. 173, citing Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, [n. p.; possibly 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, VII, p. 418].

shake the confidence of these many Jews'.<sup>66</sup> The stated purpose, in other words, was not to throw Christian belief into any doubt, but to convert the Jews. Yet not only did no Jews convert as a result of the debate, but a Jewish text claimed success in proving the fallacy of the Christian arguments.

When we compare the ending of 'Silvester', we can see that there is no question of the Jews having won the debate, or even of a stalemate. Until Zambri makes his demands, Silvester appears to have won the debate, since his arguments have silenced eleven of the twelve Jews involved. Yet there is still some potential for doubt, as Zambri points out when he says that deeds are more important than words, and demands that the rhetorical portion of the contest be capped by a test of miraculous power. For a moment, when Zambri succeeds in killing the bull, the sense of doubt increases; but Silvester immediately denies the Jewish miracle, representing Zambri's sacred name as demonic, and his deed as an act of magic. When Silvester miraculously restores the bull to life by invoking the name of Christ, the truth behind his arguments is proved. With the success of Silvester's miracle and the conversion of the Jews and pagans present, the text represents all doubts as being satisfactorily put to rest. The story depicts a moment in which rhetoric is unable to convince, and miracle is used to cover the defects of rhetoric. In the tale, most of the participants in the debate are silenced, and perhaps convinced, by means of argument alone. However, if argument fails, as happens at the end of the tale when Zambri remains unpersuaded, a demonstration of divine power can show where the truth lies.

The 'Silvester' tale is not alone in depicting the use of supernatural power used to affirm divine support, competing displays of magic or miracle, and a verbal debate with a miraculous climax. There are narratives featuring these elements in the Bible and in texts from late antiquity. The Mosaic miracles of rod and serpent are obvious precedents from the Hebrew scriptures of demonstrations of supernatural power which support claims to superiority of the faith propounded by the authors of the narrative. Moses is even depicted as engaging in a kind of duel with Pharaoh's magicians (Exodus 11-12). However, an even more striking example comes from III Kings 18. 21-40, which tells of a contest between the prophet Elias (Elijah) and the followers of Baal. Here we see, as in 'Silvester', a duel of words, albeit in the case of

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<sup>66</sup> Chazan, *Church, State and Jew*, p. 266.

Elias a very short one, followed by a supernatural contest involving sacrificial cattle and the use of opposing names of power to determine the merits of two competing faiths. When the king of Israel, Achab, displeases God by worshipping Baal, Elias prophesies drought, not to be relieved until he says the word. Elias accuses Achab of failing to follow the Lord's commandments and turning to the worship of Baal. Elias has the Israelites and the followers of Baal gather on Mount Carmel and addresses the crowd, saying, 'How long do you halt between two sides? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.' (III Kings 18. 21.) The contest then commences, according to Elias' stipulations:

Let two bullocks be given us, and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces and lay it upon wood, but put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under it. Call ye on the names of your gods, and I will call on the name of my Lord: and the God that shall answer by fire, let him be God. (III Kings 18. 23-4.)

Elias thus declares that the true religion will be the one whose god miraculously kindles the fire under the sacrificial bullock when his name is invoked. The followers of Baal call upon their god in vain, whereupon Elias builds an altar in the name of the Lord and pours water over the wood and the offering.

And when it was now time to offer the holocaust, Elias the prophet came near and said: O Lord God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Israel, shew this day that thou art the God of Israel, and I thy servant, and that according to thy commandment I have done all these things. Hear me, O Lord, hear me: that this people may learn, that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the holocaust, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw this, they fell on their faces, and they said: The Lord he is God, the Lord he is God. (III Kings 18. 36-9.)

The Baal-worshippers all praise the Israelite god, but are slain by Elias nonetheless, and God causes the rain to fall again.

The Silvester legend plays upon this theme, adding Christian elements. In the Biblical tale, two bullocks are offered for sacrifice, and miracles are requested, one in the name of Baal and one in the name of God. The latter miracle takes place, and Elias' sacrifice is accepted. Closure is gained by the execution of the unbelievers,



and by the restoration of the rainfall. When the rain returns, it symbolises a return to order in the natural world, but also in a spiritual sense, water being a metaphor for spirit, as discussed in Chapter Four. In 'Silvester', one bull is slain ('sacrificed') by a name sacred to the Jews, and then it is resurrected in the name of Christ. The intended message is not only that the name of Christ is more powerful than the name the Jews call upon, but also that Christ's sacrifice, for Christians, put an end to the Jewish custom of sacrifice. Order is restored with the conversion of the Jews and pagans present.

In both tales, the miracle is portrayed as the rhetoric to end all rhetoric, offering a proof that transcends language. It is not Elias' words, his accusation of Ahab or his challenge to the Baal-worshippers, but the miracle he stages, that convinces. While the miracles in III Kings and in 'Silvester' are portrayed as being more persuasive than words, they are nonetheless accomplished by means of words. Both groups call upon the ultimate word, the name of their god. The narratives suggest that miracles represent a revelation of God's presence that transcends all rhetoric. Yet the shift from rhetoric to miracle in these stories is thus in some sense incomplete, since the utterance of the name itself is an instance of the use of rhetoric.

The problematic nature of the relationship between rhetoric and miracle is explored further in another tale with parallels to the Silvester legend. This is 'The Discussion of Archbishop Gregentius with the Jew Herban'.<sup>67</sup> This story also uses the format of a Christian-Jewish debate culminating in a Christian miracle. It is set, according to Williams, c. 480 CE, and written c. 510-520 CE, making it roughly contemporaneous with the date of the Latin version of the *Actus Silvestri*, according to Duchesne's estimate. Because of its similarity to the Silvester story, in being both an account of a disputation and a miracle tale, the story deserves detailed attention.

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<sup>67</sup> *Sancti Gregentii, Archiepiscopi Tephrensensis, Disputatio cum Herbano Judaeo*, PG 86 (Paris: Migne, 1865), cols 621-784. Paraphrased and quoted from in English in Williams, *Adversus Judaeos*, pp. 140-50. Williams says that Gregentius 'is said to have lived for many years as an anchorite in Egypt, and then to have been sent with his secretary Palladius by Proterius, Patriarch of Alexandria (who died in A.D. 487), to be Bishop of Tephra (Zafār), the capital city of the Himyarites (or Homerites, as they are called in patristic writings) in South Arabia'. Williams describes the city as about 50 miles N.N.W of Aden (p. 142). Sale, in his preface to the Koran, takes it to be Dhafar (capital of the Himyarite dynasty, in the Ibb region of Yemen) Cf. E. M. Wherry, *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Quran: Comprising Sale's Translation and Preliminary Discourse [...]* 4 vols (London: Trübner, 1882-6), I (1882), p. 46.

It tells of a four-day debate in the city of Tephra (Zafār or Dhafar in what is now Yemen), in front of a king and an audience of Jews. The discussions focus on the Christian messianic claims for Jesus, but also contain a good deal of comment about the way in which rhetoric is deployed in the debate. For example, at the end of the first day's discussion, Herban's fellow Jews congratulate him on his ability to stand up to the Archbishop in argument, and he replies, 'Let us rather pray that the God of the Law will help us; because, as you see, the Archbishop is very skilful in the Scriptures, and no little strength is needed to persuade him'.<sup>68</sup> Herban's insight is that, in verbal debate, the most ingenious rhetorician may appear to have won. He questions whether argument alone, without divine intervention, is enough to resolve the debate; this statement reminds us of the moment in 'Silvester' when Zambri categorises words as 'ambiguous' and wants to invoke the divine name.<sup>69</sup> Herban, like Zambri, wishes to call upon the Jewish God, yet, when divine intervention does take place, it is Christ who manifests, proving the Christian argument.

On the second day, Gregentius distinguishes between seeing a miracle and hearing about one at second hand, saying to the Jews, 'If your fathers disbelieved when they saw Christ's miracles how can you—you *offspring of vipers*—believe when you only hear of them?'<sup>70</sup> While the hierarchical distinction between miracle and rhetoric emerges from Gregentius' statement, nonetheless the possibility is raised that even witnessing a miracle may not be enough to convince an unbeliever. This point perhaps signals an inconsistency in the early and medieval Christian miracle literature. Christian miracles are presented as having great powers to persuade, reform and convert, and to furnish definitive proof of the truth of the Christian faith. Yet the failure of many amongst the Jews to be persuaded by the miracles of Christ in the gospels is a central feature of the hermeneutical Jew as portrayed in these tales. This element of the gospel narratives could potentially throw some doubt on Christ's miracles. For this reason, perhaps, it was important for didactic tales not to problematise Christian miracles, even to the extent that they were willing to problematise Christian rhetoric. Thus, the blindness and intransigence of the Jews must be portrayed as having been so great that they failed to recognise even

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<sup>68</sup> Williams, pp. 143-4.

<sup>69</sup> *GL* I, p. 70; *LA*, p. 77.

<sup>70</sup> Williams, p. 145.

miraculous proof. But there remains the problem of why characters like Silvester and Gregentius, calling upon Christ, are more persuasive with regard to the Jews than Christ was during his lifetime. This problem remains unresolved in these texts, although, as we have seen, it was touched upon by Naḥmanides in the Barcelona disputation: ‘if our forefathers, who saw him and knew him, did not listen to him, how shall we believe [...]?’<sup>71</sup>

‘Gregentius and Herban’ leads the reader on by stages to anticipation of a definitive miraculous proof. At the end of the second day’s discussion, ‘the Jews once more rejoiced over Herban, and the Christians over “the blessed Gregentius, because the grace of the Spirit was with him”’.<sup>72</sup> This recalls the open-ended conclusion of Justin’s ‘Trypho’, in which Trypho departs unconvinced, both parties holding to their original views, and of the historical conclusion to the debate between Paul and Naḥmanides, in which both sides claimed the victory. But the narrative moves swiftly past the point at which there is any doubt that ‘the grace of the Spirit’ is indeed with the Christian side. On the third day Christian miracles are discussed, leading Herban to fear that they may be deployed against him: ‘No doubt you can injure me,’ he says, ‘but persuade me first with words, and then act if you are allowed to do so’.<sup>73</sup> Soon Herban has a vision of Moses first disputing with and then worshipping Christ, and prophesying that Herban will not only lose the debate but will also convert.

At the end of the final day’s discussion, Herban, like Zambri, breaks forth with an outburst:

Why waste time! cries Herban, I’ll end the controversy. Show me Jesus and I’ll be a Christian!<sup>74</sup>

The other Jews object, but Herban protests that he must believe, if it is proved to him that Jesus is the Messiah of the Prophets. He asks Gregentius to pray to Christ to ‘come down to me, that I may behold Him and speak with Him, and be baptised’.<sup>75</sup> The other Jews, in a speech resembling Zambri’s, say, ‘let us see if your talk is

<sup>71</sup> Naḥmanides, ‘Vikuah’, in Maccoby, p. 143.

<sup>72</sup> Williams, p. 146.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

justified by deeds'.<sup>76</sup> They mingle belief with disbelief, promising to believe if shown Christ, but fearing this lest they thereby become Christians, and at the same time doubting that Christ can appear, since his bones are in the tomb. After the Archbishop's prayer, Christ appears in a bright cloud heralded by earthquake and thunderstorm, blinding the eyes of the Jews, who recover their sight after being baptised, along with 'innumerable Jews', who go on to assimilate into the local Christian population.

The format of this tale is very similar to that of the 'Silvester' story. In both tales, the Christian disputant argues against the Jew or Jews, until a Jew finally protests that words are insufficient, and proposes to move the dispute into the realm of miraculous action. Again we see the pattern of Jews acting as the catalysts who provoke the occurrence of the miracle. In 'Gregentius and Herban', Herban's statement 'act if you are allowed to do so', precedes his miraculous vision of the converted Moses, and his 'Show me Christ', precedes the divine apparition. In 'Silvester,' a motive for the Jews privileging miracles over rhetoric is shown. When Zambri affects to despise the bandying of words and calls for deeds instead, it is implied that the Jewish participants only point out the defects of rhetoric once they are losing the debate. This device of its being the Jew, rather than the Christian, who gives up the verbal debate allows the Christians to show miraculous proof of their arguments without suggesting that the arguments are themselves deficient, except perhaps with regard to the unavoidable ambiguities of human language. The miracle then becomes the uber-rhetoric that proves the truth of the rhetoric that has gone before.

In his discussion of 'Gregentius and Herban', Williams suggests another factor to be considered in the sudden narrative transition between an unpersuasive debate and a persuasive miracle. He treats the narrative as an 'idealised description' of a historical event, but one that may have involved other means of convincing the Jews aside from mere argument. 'The closing pages', he writes, 'raise the suspicion that there was more than moral suasion at work'. He is evidently not referring to the miracle, but to the possibility that the Jews were converted by force, for he continues,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

‘The velvet glove covered, one fears, the iron hand’.<sup>77</sup> His important insight here regards the narrative use of miracle in such tales as a substitute for possible real events that authors wished to exclude from Christian legend. One area of elision, as we have seen concerning the Barcelona debate of 1263, was an unresolved disputation in which each side claimed the victory. But as Williams quite rightly hints, though without going into any detail, another important occurrence accompanying historical conversions of Jews was the threat of Christian violence.<sup>78</sup>

It is a notable feature of early and medieval Christian miracle tales involving Jews that the Jews, upon witnessing a miracle, convert readily; sometimes, whether disingenuously or not, promising beforehand to believe if the miracle is forthcoming, as we have seen in both ‘Silvester’ and ‘Gregentius and Herban’. Often, as again we see in both of these tales, a great number of Jews and perhaps pagans are all converted at once. Hayman, editor of *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite*, comments: ‘[T]he large number of dialogues in which the Jew (or group of Jews) is converted on the strength of a miracle performed by the Christian participant, may be suspected of concealing either the Christian’s inability to convert the opponent by the force of his argument, or of reflecting the unfortunate attempts made to convert Jews by force’.<sup>79</sup> We may infer that, especially in popular narratives, the depiction of the use of force to convert Jews would detract from the portrayal of the overwhelming effect of the revelation granted by Christian miracles. Yet historically, as we have noted before, it was often the case that force was used.

We can here turn to the 1320 account of the inquisitor Fournier, recording the testimony of a Jew, Baruch, called before the Inquisition on the charge of having returned to Judaism following a conversion to Christianity. In his defence Baruch relates a terrifying account of a rabble, bent on conversion, breaking into Jewish homes and offering them a choice between conversion and death, and recounts that he consented to baptism to avoid being murdered.<sup>80</sup> The inquisitors attempt to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p.149.

<sup>78</sup> Williams adds that, in this case, if the ‘iron hand’ had been employed it might help explain a subsequent outbreak of Jewish violence towards Christians, referring to events in the Himyarite kingdom, (modern-day Yemen) when in 523 a Jewish ruler named Masrūq came to power in Zafār and gave the Christians a choice between conversion to Judaism and death, and killing, torturing and burning many Christians before being defeated by the Abyssinians. (Williams, pp. 149-50).

<sup>79</sup> *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite*, pp. 66\*-67\*.

<sup>80</sup> Fournier, ‘Confessio Barud [Baruch] Olim Iudei’, and ‘Confession of Baruch, Once a Jew’.



persuade Baruch of the truth of Christianity by means of argument, but he is resolute in his opposition, responding with forceful counter-arguments. Although he shows no signs of weakening, the narrative records that, on being summoned again before the inquisitors, he states that he wishes to persist in his statements made in his previous confession. Then, without a break, he admits to believing in the Christian faith and formally confesses belief.

In a rather chilling statement with the air of a legal disclaimer, presumably dictated by the Inquisition, Baruch says ‘that he believed that it had been for the good of his soul that the persecution that had caused him to be baptized had happened, that he had not been brought to believe the Catholic faith by the fear of death or of torture, by the violence of the dungeon, by threats, terrors, flatteries or promises, but by the divine Scriptures which were put forward to him by my lord the bishop’ (*‘et, ut dixit, credit quod pro bono anime sue ei evenit persecutio propter quam baptizatus fuit, et quod ad credendum fidem catholicam non fuit inductus timore mortis vel tormentorum, vel violentia carceris, minis, terroribus, blanditiis vel promissionibus, sed per divinas scripturas que ei propositae fuerunt per dictum dominum episcopum’*).<sup>81</sup> Yet no reason other than such threats is advanced for his sudden and complete volte face. Later Baruch attempts to recant, begging for mercy, but is sentenced by the Inquisition. The document does not specify the sentence, saying only, ‘See the sentence in the Book of sentence on heretical deviation’ (*‘Queratur sententia in libro sententiarum heretice pravitatis’*).<sup>82</sup> The translator suggests that he could have been sentenced to wear the yellow star.

The narrative of the inquisitor Fournier is a fascinating document in that it preserves, apparently in Baruch’s own words, a Jew’s experience of conversions procured by means of violence. Yet the narrative goes on to glide over any action or speech on the inquisitors’ part that might have provoked Baruch’s sudden confession, while inadvertently revealing a little too much about the possible reasons for such a confession in Baruch’s statement that violence, dungeons and torture are in no way involved. The persuasive powers of ‘divine scripture’, to which Baruch has heretofore proved remarkably resistant, are given as the only impetus to his sudden conversion. Here we may make the connection between this and the

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<sup>81</sup> English, [n. p.]. Latin, ‘Confessio Barud’, p. 189



persuasive power of the miracle in 'Gregentius and Herban', which Williams suggests may represent the velvet glove cloaking the iron fist. In the early and medieval miracle tales, including those of the *Legenda*, the miracle offers a sufficient reason for the conversion of Jews, without any suggestion that Christians might have to resort to violent means. Christian violence as an explanation for conversions, and especially mass conversions, is erased in these tales. Thus, the resort to the miraculous not only provides closure but re-inscribes potential acts of forced conversion as spontaneous responses to benevolent miracles.

The techniques of erasure and re-inscription are not only used in the tales to provide closure and to substitute mythical miracles for historical violence. They also work within a given religious ideology to rewrite the identities of other faith groups so as to fit in with the religion's worldview. This process of re-inscription is fundamental to Funkenstein's concept of counterhistory. In the texts we have looked at, Jews and Christians attempt to re-write the self-image of the other, with each side claiming divine sanction, and accusing the other of faulty exegesis, heresy or even black magic. The distinction between miracle and magic in texts from late antiquity is connected to such counterhistorical reworkings of the claims to divine power of another faith group. When miracles are used as the ultimate apologetic rhetoric, an obvious rebuttal is the accusation that the miracles are merely magic tricks that do not proceed from any divine source. In the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, for example, before Peter's arrival in Rome, Simon Magus so impresses the citizenry of Rome by flying over the city gate in a gleaming cloud of dust that he is worshipped, and the apostle Paul, who has lately worked miracles in Rome, is accused of sorcery and deceit.<sup>83</sup> This accusation is counterhistorical in that it rewrites the identity of the miracle-working protagonist, describing him as a sorcerer, and the fount of his power as demonic.

This technique of describing the opponent's powers as magical, whether directly or by implication, is much in evidence in 'Silvester'. When the duel of words becomes a duel of powers, care is taken to show the distinction between Zambri's act and Silvester's. Not only is the name Zambri uses, according to Silvester, the name of a demon, but the miracles are shown to be distinct from one another. The death of

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

the bull not only shows itself to be the work of a demon who can kill but not resurrect, but is emblematic of Christ's death at the hands of the Jews (the crucified Christ being the replacement for the cultic sacrifice), and of the death of the Temple practices and of the Mosaic Law generally. Silvester's revival of the bull is a resurrection miracle, like the raising of Lazarus in the gospels, and this points to Christ as its ultimate author. The miracle also signifies the resurrection of Christ and of the Israelite faith under the new name of Christianity. The changed temper of the bull, from wild to tractable, symbolises the transition from the law of vengeance to the law of mercy. Thus, the nature of the miracle reveals its provenance.

Similarly, in the *Acts of Peter*, the pagan Marcellus is enabled to restore a statue of Caesar torn asunder by a demon by sprinkling it with water in Christ's name, saying:

I believe in you, Lord Jesus Christ. For your apostle Peter has examined me whether I truly believe in your holy name.<sup>84</sup>

Later, there is a disputation followed by a display of magical and miraculous powers that bears striking similarities to the 'Silvester' legend. After some initial skirmishing, Simon Magus and Peter engage in a public disputation in the Forum, before an audience of Christians and pagans, the latter including senators and officials. Peter accuses Simon of magical activities. Simon responds by attacking Christ, asking the crowd: 'Is a God born? Is he crucified?'. Peter quotes the prophets in support of the divinity of Christ, then asks Simon to perform one of his supernatural acts so that Peter can 'frustrate it through my Lord Jesus Christ'. A prefect, acting as a referee, tells Simon to kill a man and Peter to restore him, saying to the audience, 'It is for you to decide which of these is accepted before God, he who kills, or he who revives.' Simon speaks in the boy's ear and he dies. At this juncture (one suspects a juxtaposition of textual variants) Peter is told of another dead man, the son of a widow, and orders are given to bring him to the Forum. Peter, calling upon Christ, then revives both the man killed by Simon and the widow's son, making the crowd cry out 'there is only one God, the God of Peter'. A third dead

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<sup>83</sup> 'The Acts of Peter', p. 401.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 408.

man is brought out, Peter challenging Simon to revive him. Simon performs a ritual giving the corpse a partial semblance of life, which vanishes when Simon steps away. Peter begs the crowd to have mercy on Simon, insists that the dead man's slaves should be freed and performs a third triumphant resurrection.<sup>85</sup> In a sequel to this contest, Simon challenges Peter again, promising to fly up to God to prove his own divine powers. Watching him fly to and fro over the hills and temples, Peter prays to Christ to cause Simon to fall and break his leg in three places, in order to stop him from further deceiving the populace. Christ grants this request, Simon falls and is stoned, and the onlookers 'each went to his home having faith in Peter'.<sup>86</sup>

In this text, as in 'Silvester', Christ's name has the power to resurrect what a magician, or his demon, has destroyed. Both narratives stress that they do not describe mere tests of strength between two magicians, with the victors being whoever can create the most impressive display. Rather, the miraculous acts are emblematic of the characteristics the narrator wishes to attach to the religions and to the deities involved. It must be noted, however, that, particularly in the *Acts of Peter*, the distinction between Christian miracles and Simon's magic is not always so clear: Peter, calling on Christ, causes Simon to fall and break his leg, clearly a punitive miracle rather than one of healing and forgiveness. Peter also performs the somewhat bizarre feats of giving a dog and a baby the power of speech in order to reproach Simon.<sup>87</sup> Again, these resemble arguably callous acts of display rather than demonstrations of the law of mercy. Despite these disjunctive elements, however, as in 'Silvester', the supernatural plane is continually referenced with the aim of proving that the victorious contestant draws miraculous power from God. As W. Schneemelcher says,

[The Acts'] purpose is to demonstrate, in the persons of Simon and his constantly victorious adversary, that God is stronger than Satan [...] Hence Peter can ascribe what is almost redemptive significance to this contest.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp. 416-21.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 422-3.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 406-10.

<sup>88</sup> *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, 2 vols (London: SCM, 1973-4), II (1974), p. 273.

Schneemelcher here also makes the point that refuting the specific doctrines of Simonian gnosticism<sup>89</sup> are of less concern in this text than the use of Simon to personify a more general concept of evil.

This last point raises a couple of questions concerning the portrayal of Jews in tales of miracle and/or magic. The first is whether Jews in miracle texts are simply used as general personifications of Satan or Satanic adversaries, or whether their specific Jewishness, as seen through Christian eyes, is an essential feature of their representation. To some degree, there is a conflation of the two. In particular, Jews who perpetrate hostile actions are seen as adversaries: in the *Prioress' Tale*, they are specifically directed by Satan.<sup>90</sup> However, in this as in other tales featuring Jews, even if they are connected with the devil or with sorcery, other themes with particular reference to the hermeneutical Jew can be discerned. In all the tales we have discussed, elements of the portrayal of the Jew refer to the supposed Jewish role in the Passion and Crucifixion, or to the Judaic beginnings of Christianity, the Christian transition from the old faith to the new and the punitive qualities of the law of justice as opposed to the life-giving benefits of the law of mercy.

The second question is whether the accusation of magical practice was something directed specifically at the Jew. In late antiquity, accusations concerning magic were a feature of interfaith conflict.<sup>91</sup> Christians were accused of magic by pagans such as Celsus.<sup>92</sup> Yet there was also an association between Judaism and magic.<sup>93</sup> In terms of actual practice, there is evidence to show that Jews, like pagans and Christians, did make use of 'magical' charms and incantations. Directions for the working of magical spells, similar to those of the Greek magical papyri, existed

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<sup>89</sup> Simon Magus, apart from his co-starring role in the Acts of Peter, is mentioned in Acts 8. 9-24 as a sorcerer and pretender to divine powers, who attempts to purchase the power of the Holy Ghost from the apostles. Irenaeus mentions 'Simon Magus of Samaria' as a teacher of Christian heresy. According to Irenaeus, Simon, who claimed to be God in human form, consorted with an ex-slave named Helen, whom he claimed to be another divine being consigned to an earthly body, and set himself up as the leader of a sect called 'Simonians,' who practiced 'magical arts' and followed 'impious doctrines'. Irenaeus, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, trans. by Dominic J. Unger, rev. by John J. Dillon, Works of the Fathers in Translation 55 (New York: Paulist Press, 1992-), I (1992), 1.23.1-4, pp. 81-4.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. the 'Prioress' Tale', ll. 558-66, p. 210.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic*, pp. 119-25.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 121-5. Also cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.6, p. 9, and 16.39, p. 354.

<sup>93</sup> For a full account of Jewish magic in the middle ages, cf. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*. For medieval Christian associations between Jews and sorcery, cf. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*.

in Aramaic.<sup>94</sup> Trachtenberg claims that actual Jewish magical practices were not based on Satan-worship or inversions of religious ritual, but rather on the use of powerful sacred names for purposes that did not contravene religious laws.<sup>95</sup> However, he concedes the existence of texts describing Jewish magicians controlling demons.<sup>96</sup> In any case, it would not be surprising to find that medieval Christian portrayals of Jewish magic were not necessarily based on any observation of actual Jewish practice. In terms of texts like the ‘Silvester’ legend and its analogues, it seems most helpful to view the portrayal of Jews as magicians in the context of interfaith polemics in which each participant is eager to disprove the claims to divine favour made by the other, and the opponent’s miracles are re-inscribed as magic.

A central feature of the magical duel in ‘Silvester’ is the use of names of power. What Zambri defines as ‘the name of the almighty God’ is the Tetragrammaton or YHWH (representing the Hebrew letters yod he vav he).<sup>97</sup> The importance of names in magic has been linked with Egyptian practice:

The belief in the potency of certain names is very old in Egypt, and rests upon a still older idea that no creature, animate or inanimate, could be said to have an existence until it possessed a name [...]. Every god and goddess and supernatural being was believed to possess a hidden name [...]. The man who could find out these names was able to command the help of the gods who bore them, and the man who could obtain by any means a hidden name for himself thought he would be the equal of the gods. On the other hand, to destroy or “blot out” a name was to wipe out of existence the being who bore it [...]<sup>98</sup>

These ideas were widespread in the Hellenistic period. Trachtenberg claims there were Egyptian and Babylonian influences on Jewish magical ideas.<sup>99</sup> An Aramaic magical text in the Cairo Geniza charges, ‘By the power of these hidden, pure and

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<sup>94</sup> For a discussion of Jewish magical writings of late antiquity, taken from Palestinian and Syrian amulets and amulets and texts from the Cairo Geniza, see Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Magnes, 1993).

<sup>95</sup> *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, p. 15.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 91; on other names of power, cf. pp. 90-7.

<sup>98</sup> A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians or Studies in Egyptian Mythology*, 2 vols (New York: Dover, 1904, 1969), I, p. 301.

<sup>99</sup> *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, p. 11.



holy names, may you obey',<sup>100</sup> and similar spell-fragments rely heavily on the use of potent names.

The magical use of names connected the mundane and the supernatural realms. Thaumaturges, calling upon the name of God, could claim to enjoy divine favour, and to be following the will of God. But these claims were open to interpretation. Critics of a faith or sect could argue that its followers were using magic to bind the power of supernatural beings to their own wills. In this case their 'miraculous' acts were carried out by demons and were not evidence of any connection to the divine. Augustine remarked of false miracles: 'The demons indeed love those wicked theatrical displays which the chaste do not love' (*'Amant quippe illi scenicas turpitudines, quas non amat pudicitia'*).<sup>101</sup> We see this distinction made in 'Silvester' when the saint protests that Zambri 'did not utter the name of God but the name of the foulest of demons!' (*'non Dei nomen protulit, sed nomen pessimi daemonis nominavit'*).<sup>102</sup> Since God has the power of creation, Silvester reasons, whereas Zambri can only kill, he must be invoking a demon for this purpose.

Zambri's use of a sacred name, whether of demonic or divine provenance, is part of a long textual tradition found in the Mediterranean and near-Eastern cultures of late antiquity. In the *Testament of Solomon*, a Greek pseudepigraphon mingling Jewish, Christian, magical and Gnostic elements,<sup>103</sup> King Solomon derives his power over demons from a seal ring inscribed with a 'pentalpha' (pentagram). Possession of this ring, in conjunction with calling on the name of the God of Israel, allows Solomon to summon demons and angels, whose names, once learnt, give him power over them. He manages in this way to employ the archangel Uriel to supervise his demon temple-builder, and to summon the king of the demons, Beelzebub.

<sup>100</sup> Naveh, and Shaked, p. 225, citing Geniza 24, p. 4.7-9.

<sup>101</sup> *City of God*, 8.19, p. 339; *De civitate Dei*, 8.19, col. 243.

<sup>102</sup> *GL* I, p.70; *LA*, p. 78

<sup>103</sup> 'Testament of Solomon (translated from the codex of the Paris Library, after the edition of Fleck, *Wissensch. Reise*, bd. ii. abth. 3)', trans. by F.C. Conybeare, *JQR* 11 (1898), 15-45; passages paraphrased here are from pp. 16-19. This text contains elements of the cycle of Solomonic legend, with addenda through the medieval period. A useful summary of scholarly work on text and contents, with particular attention to the complex matter of dating, is James Harding and Loveday Alexander, 'Dating the Testament of Solomon' (1999), [http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~www\\_sd/date\\_tsol.html](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~www_sd/date_tsol.html) [accessed 29.06.06] The authors arrive at a very tentative date of the sixth century as a time when a text could have taken shape, but say that some of its traditions are older, possibly dating from the first century.



An extract from this text, in which Solomon acquires his seal, the pentacle, resembles the episode in 'Silvester' in which the saint is instructed by God to go down to a dragon imprisoned in a pit, and bid it wait there until the Day of Judgement:

And it came about through my prayer that grace was given to me from the Lord Sabaoth by Michael his archangel. [He brought me] a little ring, having a seal consisting of an engraved stone, and said to me: 'Take, O Solomon, king, son of David, the gift which the Lord God has sent thee, the highest Sabaoth. With it thou shalt lock up all demons of the earth, male and female; and with their help thou shalt build up Jerusalem. [But] thou [must] wear this seal of God. [...]'<sup>104</sup>

Similarly, Silvester is instructed to 'tie up [the dragon's] mouth with a thread and seal it with a ring with a cross on it' ('*Os autem ejus ligabis filo et annulo crucis habente signum desuper sigillabis*').<sup>105</sup> This episode from 'Silvester' also has strong echoes of Revelation (Apocalypse in the Douay-Rheims Bible):

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. And he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should no more seduce the nations, till the thousand years be finished. And after that, he must be loosed a little time. (Apoc. 20. 1-3)

The author of Revelation used the idea of the Ineffable Name and stressed that it was the greatest power against Satan. Margaret Barker's remarks on this are worth quoting at length:

The LORD set bounds for the sea and made bonds for the stars to keep them in their orbits (Job 38. 10, 31). The Prayer of Manasseh 3 described the process vividly: 'Thou who hast made heaven and earth with all their order; who hast shackled the sea by thy word of command, who hast confined the deep and sealed it with thy terrible and glorious Name'. The sea appears in the Book of Revelation as one aspect of the red dragon, the ancient serpent [...].

<sup>104</sup> 'Testament of Solomon', p. 16.

<sup>105</sup> *GL* I, p. 70; *LA* p. 78.

The bonds were sealed by the Name, and the one who bore the Name literally held the covenant, the creation, in being. The high priest wore the sacred seal engraved with the Name, and in the ritual he became the seal of the bonds of the creation. [...] In Revelation [Christ] is the warrior priest who rides from heaven wearing a diadem engraved with the Name which no one knows but himself. After his triumph over the beast and the kings of the earth (19. 11-21), the ancient serpent is sealed in a pit for a thousand years (20. 1-3), so that the creation can be restored as the millennium kingdom.

The Name was also described as the great oath by which the creation was bound, for example, in a fragment of poetry embedded in the Parables of Enoch, in which one of the evil angels tried to learn the secret Name so as to have power over the creation, but Michael would not reveal it.<sup>106</sup>

The ineffable Name both creates and circumscribes creation, having the power to create boundaries and exclude what is unwanted, represented by the dragon, and seal it in the pit. The possessor of the Name thus controls demons and enrolls them in his service. In 'Silvester' these ideas link the disputation episode, in which the name of Christ is allied with creation, resurrection and life, and the dragon episode, in which Christ's power seals the dragon in the pit. When viewed in the context of Revelation and the *Testament of Solomon*, Silvester emerges as a figure who, like the angel in Revelation and like Solomon, can by the grace of God confine Satan and his demons and force them to serve the will of God.

Yet Silvester is critical of Zambri's use of a demon's name: in this text the magical elements of Solomonic practice are consigned to the Jews, and to an inferior level in the hierarchy of supernatural acts. In 'Silvester', when the name of Christ is represented as triumphing over Zambri's name 'of almighty God', the creative, life-giving powers of the Name are transferred to Christ, and the outmoded name of the Old Testament God is demonised. What is being demonstrated to the reader is the replacement of the Jewish concept of God with the concept of a salvation that comes through Christ, giving the hope of resurrection. This process, like the attempted appropriation of the Name by the evil angel in 'Enoch', is emblematic of the counterhistorical narrative process described by Funkenstein. The attempt to gain power by appropriating the opponent's ultimate source of power, the divine name, is a fight to control the ultimate rhetorical tool. The battle between names has to do not

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<sup>106</sup> *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 41-2.

only with the events of the tales in a literal sense, but also with gaining control over contested areas of rhetoric and ideology.

The meanings attached to the concept of 'sealing', protecting and consecrating by means of the sign of the cross, which were discussed in Chapter Four, can be expanded when we look at 'Silvester', the *Testament of Solomon* and Revelation. In these texts the seal is used to mark and close off areas of danger, subdue the enemy, and ensure that ultimately the enemy, whether it is the dragon or the Jews, fulfils its eschatological function in accordance with divine will. Again, this could be taken to symbolise the counterhistorical mode of narrative, in which the rhetoric of an opponent can be re-inscribed and controlled. We may look again at the prominent metaphor of a person or object being cast into a pit or well and emerging transformed. If sealing the dragon or devil into a pit means excluding and controlling unwanted and dangerous rhetoric, emergence from the pit signifies re-inscription, the opponent's rhetoric tamed (like the bull in 'Silvester') and made to serve the purposes of the tales' authors.

The passages from Revelation explain the dragon's confinement as being imposed 'that he should deceive the nations no more', a theme the 'Silvester' legend picks up on when it relates that, in being delivered from the dragon, the Roman people are also being delivered from the worship of the devil. The imprisonment of the dragon can thus be seen as an attempt to control the ideology and rhetoric of paganism, equated with the poisonous exhalation of the dragon, and it is the dragon's mouth (false speech) that Silvester must seal with the cross. In the disputation episode, Zambri has implied that Silvester is a deceiver, and complains about the ambiguity of the words used in the debate. Yet the text portrays his attempt to control deceitful Christian rhetoric through the use of the 'name of the almighty God' ('*nomen Dei omnipotentis*')<sup>107</sup> as a failure, since the name turns out to be demonic, and his claim proof of his own deceitful rhetoric. The 'Silvester' legend and its analogues thus throw doubt on Jewish uses of the sacred name, while emphasising the redemptive powers of the name of Christ. Certainly, there is a process of re-inscription at work whereby a shadow of dark and magical dealings is cast upon

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<sup>107</sup> GL I, p. 70; LA, p. 77.

Jewish religious practice, whereas Christian miracles are defended from any taint of sorcery.

However, the sense of ambiguity regarding Jewish use of the Name in the Christian texts is something that can also be found in certain Jewish sources. Magic and miracles were not always easy to distinguish, and even within a given faith, controversy could arise as to which was being used, and which was acceptable. Trachtenberg discusses some of the problems medieval Jewish scholars found with respect to the correct use of sacred names.<sup>108</sup> Certain Jewish texts make use of humour and satire to discuss the use of the Ineffable Name. Chief among these is a counterhistorical version of the 'Finding of the Cross' legend (discussed in Chapter Four).<sup>109</sup> This story forms part of the *Sefer Toldoth Jeshu*, a satirical Jewish text dealing with the life of Christ and related issues.<sup>110</sup> In the Christian version of the legend, the True Cross is recovered by Queen Helena, utilising Jewish knowledge of its whereabouts. In the Jewish version, Helena threatens the Jews of Jerusalem with

<sup>108</sup> *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, pp. 80, 86 and 88.

<sup>109</sup> For an English translation, cf. John Freeland, 'Medieval Jewish Legends On Matters Connected With Christianity', *American Ecclesiastical Review* (June 1908), 630-42, citing the Vienna MS of the *Toldoth Jeshu*. Freeland's translation is paraphrased in the following paragraph.

<sup>110</sup> *Sefer Toldoth Jeshu* (many variant spellings exist) is the name given to a group of Hebrew texts providing a satirical counterpoint to early Christian texts. Parts of the *Toldoth* have been translated in Hugh Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews: A New Translation of the Jewish Life of Jesus (the Toldoth Jeshu), with an Inquiry into the Nature of its Sources and Special Relationship to the Lost Gospel According to the Hebrews* (London: Duckworth, 1937). Schonfield says that the texts are found in Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish MSS, 'few of them earlier than the sixteenth century'. Printed versions also exist: 'Liber Toldos Jeschu', in Wagenseil, *Tela Ignea Satanae*, 2 vols (Altdorf: 1681; repr. Westmead, Farnborough: Gregg, 1970), II, pp. 1-45 (original pagination), and Huldreich, *Historia Jeschua Nazareni* (Leiden: 1705) (Schonfield, p. 29). The *Toldoth*, however, is thought to be of a much earlier date than these MSS and editions might suggest. Agobard of Lyons mentions a version of the *Toldoth* in 826 (Schonfield, pp. 29-30). Schonfield is of the opinion that the earliest version of the *Toldoth* is 'no later than the fifth century' (p. 30). Schonfield lists five types of *Toldoth* texts. His translation is of a text from Type One, similar to the Wagenseil edition. (Schonfield, p. 31, citing E. Bischoff, *Ein jüdisch-deutsches Leben Jesu* (Leipzig, 1895)). The Freeland article discussed above is from Type Two, 'De Rossi', from the 'Codex Vindabona', a Hebrew MS in the Israel Theological Academy at Vienna. Cf. also Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Lost and Hostile Gospels: An Essay on the 'Toldoth Jeschu', and the Petrine and Pauline Gospels of the First Three Centuries of which Fragments Remain* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1874), for another translation of a Type One text; Morris Goldstein, *Jesus and the Jewish Tradition* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), for a paraphrase and discussion; David Biale, 'Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: The *Sefer toldot yeshu* and the *Sefer zerubavel*', *Jewish Social Studies* 6.1 (1999), 130-45, for a discussion of the *Toldoth* based on Funkenstein's concept of counterhistory; Samuel Krauss, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy from the Earliest Times to 1789*, rev. by William Horbury, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995-), I, *History*, pp. 44-5, on similarities between the 'Silvester' discussion and the *Toldoth*; and Martin Lockshin, 'Translation as Polemic: The Case of *Toledot Yeshu*', in *Minhah le-Nahum: Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna in Honour of his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. by Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), on translating the *Toldoth*.

death if they do not reveal the location of the cross. In desperation, they decide to create a fake. They bury three old pieces of wood, which they proceed to ‘discover’, hoping that this will appease Christian animosity to them. Paralleling an episode from one of the Christian versions, in which Christ’s cross is distinguished from the thieves’ crosses by its ability to resurrect the dead, Rabbi Juda pretends to restore a dead man by touching him with the three crosses in succession, until he is completely revived by the third. Secretly, however, Juda has pronounced the Ineffable Name over the corpse, and it is this that brings the man to life.

Although this appears to be a genuine miracle, as the dead man is wholly restored to life by the power of the Name, what is emphasised is not merely the blessed quality of the Name and its ability to resurrect the dead. As a counterhistorical text, this legend’s response to the text it satirises is to put a different interpretation on the events of the original. The resurrection is essentially an act of deceit, carried out in desperation. It is an ironic Jewish attempt to prove the truth of Christianity to the Christians, not because the Jews believe in this truth, but so that the Christians will leave them alone. In the Christian *Acts of Peter*, discussed above, Simon Magus’ use of the Name only restores a faint motion to the dead man, but cannot actually bring him to life. Thus Peter accuses Simon of deceiving the populace into belief in Simon’s non-existent divine powers, and this deceit is regarded as the diagnostic marker of a magical, rather than a miraculous act. In the *Toldoth Jeshu*, the Jews know that they are practicing deceit, but the deceit consists in concealing from the Christians that it is in fact the Jews who possess the genuine Name with its divine and curative powers: while the Christians are persuaded that their idea of hidden Jewish knowledge is correct, the Jewish secret is that their hidden knowledge relates not to Christ but to the efficacy of their own tradition. Thus the use of the Ineffable Name is both magical and miraculous. In one sense, Rabbi Juda’s use of the name is a magic trick, an act of sleight-of-hand designed to deceive; yet in another sense it is a true miracle, but one that cannot openly be deployed for polemical purposes.

In this tale, the distinction between magic and miracle may be blurred for reasons of satire. Yet within the Jewish tradition one may cite other examples of doubt being cast on the attempt to win arguments by miraculous means. Such an



example is cited by Daniel Boyarin, a tale of Rabbi Eli‘ezer from the Babylonian Talmud. When the rabbi finds himself defeated in argument, he attempts to prove his point by performing miracles: he causes a carob to uproot itself, water to flow backwards and the walls of the House of Study to threaten to fall. His opponents deny that these things constitute proof. Eli‘ezer then says that if the Law is as he says, let it be proven from Heaven. Whereupon ‘a voice came from heaven and announced: The law is in accordance with the view of Rabbi Eli‘ezer’. Rabbi Yehoshua‘ responds, ‘It [the Torah] is not in heaven’.<sup>111</sup> In other words, the Law as it is understood on earth carries more authority than any heavenly revelation. Boyarin notes that the rabbinical authority to interpret oral Torah (passed down from Sinai and represented by the walls of the House of Study) is upheld, and Eli‘ezer’s attempt to invoke the miraculous against this authority is a threat to the rabbinic tradition and is rejected.<sup>112</sup>

Boyarin contrasts this tale with a Christian tale from Rufinus of Aquileia of a disputation at Nicaea in which a philosopher admits himself defeated by a Christian of simple faith, saying that he can match rhetoric with rhetoric, but ‘when power rather than words came out of the mouth of the speaker’ he could not resist.<sup>113</sup> This theme of the miraculously manifest power and grace of the Christian God overcoming mere rhetoric is a key element in the Christian disputation-cum-miracle tales involving Jews. It should be noted, however, that ideas about tradition can also be present in the Christian material. In the ‘Beirut’ tale, discussed in Chapter Three, for example, an icon that emits blood when abused is associated with an authoritative tradition regarding its provenance. In the ‘Finding’ tale, discussed in Chapter Four, the idea of a secret Jewish tradition regarding Jesus, passed down by direct transmission, is important. However, tradition is not privileged over miracle in these tales; both the Beirut icon and the True Cross generate miracles that not only convert the Jews present, but also establish the sacred object as a focus of subsequent worship. In these tales, the objects can boast two sorts of authenticity: that derived

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<sup>111</sup> Baba Mesa‘i 59a, cited in Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 168-9.

<sup>112</sup> Boyarin, p. 169.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 168, citing Rufinus, *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia*, Books 10 and 11, trans. by Philip R. Amidou (New York: OUP, 1997).



from the transmission of a tradition, and that derived from the sudden conferral of miraculous grace.

Unlike the Christian sources, however, the tale of Eli‘ezer pits a tradition, here of the transmission of the oral Torah (to which we may compare the idea of the authority conferred by the apostolic succession), *against* the miraculous voice from heaven. The implication could be that the voice from heaven is false, a deception on the part of Eli‘ezer, thus having an attribute of what, in the Christian tales, would be deemed magical or demonic. Or, the idea of the authority of the miraculous may be being denied altogether, as Boyarin says: contravention of natural laws cannot supplant a learned and authorised tradition in conveying divine power, authority or favour, ‘God himself and his miracles cannot interfere with this holy dialectic’.<sup>114</sup> It may be that this tale is viewing the miraculous as merely another branch of rhetorical persuasion, and pointing out its inferiority. In any case what we clearly see in this tale, as in the *Toldoth Jeshu* ‘Finding’ satire, is a willingness to problematise the Name and the voice of God, either in themselves, or because God manifests more truly through the rabbinic tradition, or because ultimately the use of the name and the sounding of the voice can only manifest as rhetoric on the human level, and are thus unauthoritative. Hence the value of direct transmission from Sinai and the rabbinic upholding of this tradition, which legitimizes oral Torah, not miracle, as the ultimate rhetoric to end rhetoric. In the ‘Silvester’ legend, in contrast, the saint’s use of the name of Christ is not problematised, but is entirely effective, transcending the rhetoric of the debate and providing closure by authoritatively revealing Christian truth.

Finally in this connection we can compare the *Toldoth Jeshu* story of how ‘Yeshu’, or Jesus, evades the vigilance of the Temple to steal the Name for himself, and uses it to perform miracles and to combat Judas Iscariot. Morris Goldstein comments on its similarity to the Silvester legend ‘with respect to matching Name versus Name’.<sup>115</sup> The following paragraphs briefly describe (omitting many events) a

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<sup>114</sup> Boyarin, p. 169.

<sup>115</sup> *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition*, p. 162. Goldstein cites the opinion of Samuel Krauss (*Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, LXXVII (1933), pp. 44ff. and especially pp. 57-8) that the ‘Silvester’ disputation, if a real event, may have sparked the writing of the *Toldoth Jeshu*; however, Goldstein points out the mythic nature of the debate. Krauss, however, seems to regard the *Toldoth Jeshu* as a counterhistorical response to a Christian text or texts, rather than to an event.

section of Hugh Schonfield's translation of the Strasbourg Codex (type Wagenseil).<sup>116</sup> In this excerpt, relating the activities and death of Jesus, he is depicted, like Judah in the *Toldoth Jeshu* 'Finding', as using the Name to counterfeit miracles. The Ineffable Name is kept in the Temple, and brass dogs (in some versions, lions) bound to pillars of iron guard it; if they bay at whoever steals the Name, he will forget it. Jesus only manages to obtain the Name by slicing open his thigh and inserting the parchment containing the Name into his flesh, so that when the dogs bay and he forgets, he can retrieve it.<sup>117</sup>

Another Jewish text, from the ninth century, contains a similar incident. A young cantor is found to be a re-animated corpse, and confesses this to a rabbi: 'he related that a group of scholars in Jerusalem had once inserted the Tetragrammaton into an incision made in his right arm, thereby saving him from a premature death and giving him an indefinite extension of life'. When the Rabbi removes the Name, the youth falls down lifeless. The use of the Name here seems to belong to the category of magic or false miracles, since the re-animated youth was unable to say the word 'Lord' when praying.<sup>118</sup> Perhaps, the text is emphasising that the Name has been used in an unauthorised context, to do the will of man rather than to praise God. The resemblances with the later Golem stories are also striking.<sup>119</sup>

As for the idea of magical symbols inserted into the body, Morton Smith cites a rabbinic text that refers to spells being engraved on flesh, saying 'But is it not <the case that> Ben Stada brought magic marks from Egypt in the scratches on his flesh?'.<sup>120</sup> Ben Stada is a name that has been associated with veiled references to Christ in the Talmud, although the degree to which they can be identified is disputed.<sup>121</sup> Both the tradition that 'Yeshu' brought magic back from Egypt, and the

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Speaking of the disputation portion of the Silvester legend, Krauss writes, 'If the Syriac version of the legend is indeed early, this would support my assertion that the *Toldoth Jeshu*, originally written in Aramaic, were a Jewish counterpart to Christian propaganda written in Syriac.' (*The Jewish-Christian Controversy*, p. 45.)

<sup>116</sup> According to the *Hebrews*, pp. 39-53.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-40.

<sup>118</sup> This story is cited in Starr, p. 117, citing (stories about) Ahīma'as of Oria, in 'Sefer Yuhasīn', ed. by A. Neubauer, *Anecdota Oxoniensia: Semitic Series*, I, 6, *Medieval Jewish Chronicles* (Oxford, 1895), II, 112f, and in A. Kahana, *Sifrut ha-Historiah ha-Yisraelit* (Warsaw, 1922) I, pp. 118-20. Starr (p. 100) cites another very similar tale from Neubauer, pp. 113f., and Kahana, pp. 119f.

<sup>119</sup> As Starr suggests, p. 100. On the Golem, cf. Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions On the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

<sup>120</sup> Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper, 1981), p. 47.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. for example Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, p. 59.

idea of his burying the Name in an incision in his flesh, do seem to be referenced here. We may also compare tales in which we have seen the importance of magical symbols being worn or carried on the person, as the 'Silvester' episode in which Silvester subdues the dragon, in which a cross is engraved on Silvester's ring,<sup>122</sup> the *Testament of Solomon*, in which the seal of Solomon bears an engraving of the pentagram,<sup>123</sup> and Revelation, in which Christ has a secret name written on his head or his diadems (Apoc. 19. 11-21).

Jesus quotes Scripture to prove he is the Messiah, but tangible proof is demanded of him, and he performs cures by speaking the letters of the Ineffable Name, a feat which he performs in front of 'Queen Helene', convincing her.<sup>124</sup> Jesus and Judas Iscariot, who has similarly stolen the Name and acquired magical powers, engage in a competition based on the magical duel between Peter and Simon Magus in the 'Acts of Peter'.<sup>125</sup> Jesus says to the queen, 'Of me it was said, I will ascend into heaven'. Schonfield notes that in Wagenseil's edition, there follows a dialogue in which Jesus and Judas quote texts at one another, making that particular version adhere to the 'disputation followed by miracle' topos. After this, Jesus takes action:

Then lifted he up his hands as the wings of an eagle and did fly, and the world was amazed before him, How is he able to fly between heaven and earth!

Then said the elders of Israel to Judas Iscariot, Do thou make mention of the letters and ascend after him.

And straightway he did so, and flew in the heavens, and the world was amazed, How are they able to fly like eagles!

Until Iscariot gripped him and flew in the heavens; but he was not able to force him down to the earth, neither one the other by means of the Ineffable Name; for the Ineffable Name was with each of them.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, Judas defiles Jesus: '[Judas] acted foully, and polluted Jesus, so that he became unclean and fell to the earth, and Judas also with him'.<sup>127</sup> Jesus is captured

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<sup>122</sup> *GL* I, p. 70; *LA*, p. 78.

<sup>123</sup> 'Testament of Solomon', p. 16.

<sup>124</sup> *According to the Hebrews*, pp. 40-2.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Baring-Gould, p. 85.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>127</sup> Many translators have been evasive when it comes to the act committed by Judas, and it is often referred to simply as 'defilement', or even omitted altogether. Biale, however, comments: 'Judah lifts off after [Jesus] and, in a dramatic aerial combat, brings Jesus crashing down to earth by ejaculating on him, thus rendering him and the magical name of God impure. Some of the versions more

and 'it was seen that the Ineffable Name had departed from him'.<sup>128</sup> Jesus, foreseeing trouble, has 'caused by the Ineffable Name that no tree should bear him', however, he is hanged on a carob-stalk, defeating the prohibition. When it is reported that he has vanished from the grave, 'insurgents' claim that he has ascended to heaven. However, it is found that a gardener had removed him and buried him under sand and caused water to cover the grave. The 'keeper of the garden' has done this in order that 'the insurgents' cannot steal the body to advance their claims. The body is shown to the Queen, who realises that his messianic claims have been false.<sup>129</sup>

The burial episode seems to be a parody of the description in the gospel of Matthew of events surrounding the burial of Christ:

And the next day, which followed *the day of preparation*, the chief priests and the Pharisees came together to Pilate, Saying: Sir, we have remembered, that that seducer said, while he was yet alive: After three days I will rise again. Command therefore the sepulchre to be guarded until the third day: lest perhaps his disciples come and steal him away, and say to the people: He is risen from the dead; and the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate saith to them: You have a guard; go, guard it as you know. (Matt. 27. 62-4)

The inclusion of the 'gardener' is also an echo of the experience of Mary as recounted in John, when she meets the resurrected Christ:

When she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing; and she knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith to her: Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, thinking it was the gardener, saith to him: Sir, if thou hast taken him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. (John 20. 14-15)

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prudishly have Judah urinate on Jesus, but urine does not cause cultic impurity' (Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity', p. 133). Wagenseil's Latin translation has 'urine': '*Juda animadvertens, non valere se tantum ut opera Jeschu exsuperare queat, corporis sui saccato humore eum proluit, unde immundi reddit, in terram prolapsi sunt, ob contractam impuritatem ambo usu Schem Hamphoraseh privi, quoad abluerentur.*' ('Judas, realizing that he was not strong enough to be able to best the acts of Jesus, wetted him with the strained liquid (i.e., "urine" - a phrase attested just once in Lewis and Short from Lucretius) of his body, whence they were rendered unclean and fell to earth, and because of the contracted uncleanness they were both deprived of the use of the Name of Extension until they might be cleansed.' Trans. by Michael L. Kay.) 'Liber Toldos Jeschu', p. 13. Compare the 'Acts of Peter', in which Peter causes Simon to fall from the sky and break his leg in three places ('Acts of Peter', pp. 422-23).

<sup>128</sup> According to the Hebrews, pp. 44-5.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-3.

The description of the burial and ‘resurrection’ of Jesus in this text represents an inversion of the topos that we have seen in the *Legenda* and other tales, in which a person or item is buried in a well, pit or other enclosure, and emerges transformed. Queen Helene believes Jesus’ messianic claims until the emergence of his corpse from the underwater burial (compare the underwater burial of the Cross in Christian versions of the ‘Finding’) exposes him as a false messiah. Thus, the burial and emergence that he undergoes diminishes his authority, since, when his body is revealed, claims of his resurrection are disproved. His value is decreased after his emergence.

The Name itself undergoes a similar process. It is ‘buried’ by being concealed in the wound in Jesus’ thigh. When it emerges it has lost the authority it enjoyed in the context of the temple, and no divine sanction is attached to its subsequent use. Similarly, in the Jewish variant of the ‘Finding’ legend, the crosses when unearthed only appear to have resurrective powers, but in fact, being only old pieces of wood, have acquired nothing but the power to deceive. The process of ‘burial’ and ‘resurrection’ in these tales has resulted in a loss of authority and value, rather than an increase, as we find when this theme appears in the Christian legends we have discussed. It is interesting to speculate that this thematic inversion in the parodic episodes in the *Toldoth Jeshu* may be a deliberately-employed counterhistorical technique, which would indicate a subtle awareness on the part of the authors of the use of the burial and resurrection theme in the Christian texts the *Toldoth* parodies.

In the *Toldoth Jeshu*, the Name is depicted as a powerful tool in the hands of whoever may possess it, although it should be pointed out that in each case the texts refer to an unauthorised use of the Name, not to its invocation by a priest in the synagogue or Temple. In Christian texts such as ‘Silvester’ and ‘Gregentius and Herban’, we have seen that Jewish characters protest that rhetoric is ambiguous, and may convince according to the skill of the rhetor rather than the truth of the argument. It is striking that the use of the Name as depicted in the Jewish sources we have cited is subject to very similar constraints. Like the Talmudic story quoted in Boyarin, which treats the voice from heaven as a rhetorical statement that, being unauthorised, cannot be adduced as proof, the *Toldoth Jeshu* shows the Name being used without the sanction of the Temple priests. It is thus capable of manipulation,



but does not constitute proof of the holiness of the possessor. The Name in these texts may derive creative power from God, but does not bestow God's sanction upon the acts done in and by means of his Name. Thus, the Name, at least outside the authorising context of the Temple, does not escape from a rhetorical and contingent status.

By contrast, in the Christian texts, the name of Christ and images of Christ or the Cross are presented as embodying Christ's presence, even in an 'unauthorised' context. Christ's name, his icons and symbols are presented as partaking of the quality of the Logos, God's original Word, which both personifies and transcends language. The authors of the Christian tales seem unwilling to leave hearers under the impression that Christ's name and symbols have a rhetorical status, and are therefore as problematic as any form of language. Instead, it is the Jewish characters that are associated with the exploration of the limitations of rhetoric. Doubts about the relationship of names and symbols to the will of God are assigned to Jewish discursive and religious practice. As we have seen, there seems, oddly enough, to be a certain accuracy in this portrayal. Yet, Christian texts like 'Silvester' are not merely assigning to Jews a willingness to explore issues relating to sacred rhetoric and sacred presence. Rather, these texts assign a purely rhetorical, literal status to Jewish exegesis and Jewish 'miracles', while Christian exegesis and miracles are imbued with spiritual force. Thus, miracles involving Christian sacred names and images are shown as being instantly persuasive, while Jewish attempts to invoke the Name give proof of the moribund nature of their beliefs. The 'Silvester' legend also makes clear that what the Jews take to be the name of the 'almighty God' is, in fact, the name of a demon. The accusation is made that Jewish rhetoric, and miracle, fail because their ultimate Logos is not Christ but the Devil.

Yet Jewish rhetoric cannot be dismissed so simply in these early and medieval Christian texts. Jewish words, however maligned in the stories, still have value. In order that the Jews be silenced, disputation texts insist they must first be listened to, just as in order to understand the gospels it is necessary first to read the Old Testament. For if the Jews have a special relationship with their 'father, the devil' (John 8. 44), they also have a special relationship with God. Since the Jews are the original followers of God, the tie between Jews and the Logos can never be



severed in early and medieval Christian ideology. Even when portrayed as cunning disputants and magicians, the Jews still retain their status as participants in the original covenant with God. Their imagined voices, even if figured as false, poisonous or demonic, nonetheless bear inescapable traces of God's word and God's presence as revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. Thus, the founding myths of Christendom show the True Cross emerging because of the words of a Jew, and Constantine's mother's conversion caused by listening to a debate with Jews. The Christian need to hear and learn from the authentic voice of the Jew is as prominent in these texts as Christian hatred of Jewish unbelief. This gives rise to a mythic structure in which the Jews are given a voice, but then silenced, first by means of debate, and ultimately by a Christian miracle.

## Afterword

In the foregoing pages, tales about Jews and miracles from the *Legenda Aurea* have been subjected to a primarily literary analysis. These tales, particularly the short tales involving Jews and images, may seem simple on first reading. Yet, when examined in literary terms, they yield richness and complexity, revealing shared patterns, themes and theological underpinnings that pertain to the Jews as imagined by early and medieval Christianity. In addition to literary analysis, however, it would be interesting to develop a chronology for some of the earlier tale types. In particular, the emergence and development of icon desecration tales could very usefully be charted, as Rubin has done with host desecration narratives, and Hsia, for example, has done with ritual murder accusations. Then we would have a fuller picture of the development of anti-Jewish topoi in tales through the Christian centuries. It would also be instructive to look more closely at the correspondences between these different sorts of tales, in order to develop a fuller sense of the ways in which the narratives of early and medieval Christians used and developed their construct of the imagined or 'hermeneutical' Jew.

The development of that construct reveals a struggle to come to terms with Jewishness, and what kind of place the Jew could occupy in a medieval Christian world. Without being able to allow Jewish communities true equality and autonomy, early and medieval Christian communities were faced with the reality of the continued existence and activity of Jews. The evocation of the Jew in increasingly fantastic stories throughout the middle ages, and the attempt to negate the Jewish danger within a narrative context by means of discourse about miracles, were ways in which Christians strove to come to terms with the uneasy presence of Jews in their midst. The use of miracles in narratives addressed this unease. Miracle narratives spoke about the intervention of a divine power capable of definitively and unambiguously neutralising threats to the Corpus Christi. With total Jewish conversion as an unrealised eschatological hope, narratives in which Jews were converted by Christian revelation, experienced through the agency of miracles,

provided a theoretical containment of the Jewish threat, at least for the time it took to recite the tale. In miracle tales, a world in which Christianity's relationship with its detractors could be fraught, unstable and at times violent, was painlessly transformed into a world in which doubt, dissent and disorder could be miraculously resolved.

It is true that Jewishness for early and medieval Christians represented in part an 'otherness' that could threaten the integrity of the Corpus Christi. However, the *Legenda* tales, like other Christian representations of Jews from late antiquity through the middle ages, reveal a need for the doctrines of Christianity to be authenticated by the authority of the Jew, as well as a need to penalise the Jew for rejecting Christ. This paradoxical attitude towards the imagined Jew is at the heart of the tales about Jews in the *Legenda*. The content of the tales inevitably reflects early Christian theology and apologetics, substituting for argument a variety of mysterious events concerning Jews interacting, sometimes violently, sometimes relatively peacefully, with Christians or Christian images. The tales offer a series of snapshots in which the 'hermeneutical' Jew is captured acting out a problematic yet inescapable relationship with Christ. This preoccupation with the supposed Jewish fascination with Christianity represents a powerful urge to incorporate the Jewish beginnings of Christianity into the stories Christians told.

Jewishness lay at the core of the medieval Christian concept of Christian identity. The body of Christ was a Jewish body, transcending but never wholly abandoning its Jewishness. Unconverted Jews, like limbs that have unaccountably strayed from their torso, are depicted in the *Legenda* tales as seeking a way back to the body, which is eager to integrate them through conversion. Scattered, dispersed and removed from the body by their refusal to accept Christ, Jews nonetheless also represent an earlier paradigm of integration with God, the covenant between God and Israel. Jews were prophets, forerunners and physical ancestors of Christ, and never, in the medieval Christian imagination, ceased to bear traces of the authority of the prophets and patriarchs. Hence, the *Legenda* stories stress the value of Jewish witness of, and participation in, the transformative experience contained in miracle. This is the experience of death and rebirth central to the Christian myth. Jews in the *Legenda* tales may attack Christian bodies, but in converting, they die as Jews and are reborn as Christian bodies, emulating the sacrifice of Christ. The tales provide a

resolution in which the Jew, who is simultaneously self and other, can be reconciled with, and subsumed into, the Corpus Christi, which only then can achieve perfect wholeness.

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